Abstract

This thesis offers a partial historiography of a cross-cultural reporting course taught in a Canadian journalism school, the Ryerson School of Journalism. At its initiation, this course was the first of its kind in Canada to address a pressing need for journalists to challenge the stereotyping of racialized minorities in mainstream media within the backdrop of changing demographics in Canada and a globalized media landscape. Drawing from interviews with the creator of the course and subsequent instructors, this study will detail the emotional and political challenges that instructors faced in developing and implementing the course, and the curriculum changes they made to overcome these challenges. This thesis then examines what journalism schools can learn from Ryerson about the obstacles that instructors face when teaching students about race in the media.
Preface

This research was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board with certificate number H10-03176.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................... ii
Preface ..................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ................................................................................................. vi
Dedication ................................................................................................................. vii

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Rationale ........................................................................................................ 1
  1.2 Research Method and Questions .................................................................... 4
  1.3 Terminology .................................................................................................... 4

2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review .................................................... 6
  2.1 Problematizing Minorities in Mainstream Press .............................................. 6
  2.2 The Prevalence of Biased Framing: Why Misrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Racialized Minorities Continue to Exist ................................................................. 8
  2.3 Diversifying the Newsroom ........................................................................... 11
  2.4 Denial of Systemic Discrimination ................................................................. 13
  2.5 Overcoming Structural Bias in the News ....................................................... 13
  2.6 The Role of Journalism Education in Unlearning Racial Stereotypes .......... 17

3 Course Introduction ............................................................................................... 21
  3.1 Significance of the Course ............................................................................ 22
     3.1.1 Confronting Structural Bias .................................................................... 22
     3.1.2 Making Stories Relevant to the Community is Good Business ............. 25

4 Facing Discomfort, Hostility and Disappointment: The Role of Emotions in Implementing This Course ..................................................................................... 26
  4.1 Confronting Angry Students ......................................................................... 26
  4.2 Showdown with Faculty Members .................................................................. 28
  4.3 Factoring Student and Faculty Reactions into Curriculum Decisions: Taking the Path of Least Resistance ................................................................. 30

5 From Being Ghettozied to Being Holistic: Course Changes Over the Years ......................................................................................................................... 34
  5.1 Curriculum Changes ......................................................................................... 34
  5.2 From Being Ghettozied to Being Holistic ....................................................... 36
  5.3 From a Separate Diversity Course to Incorporating Diversity into the Curriculum ..................................................................................................................... 37
     5.3.1 Importance of Driving Diversity into Journalism's DNA ....................... 38

6 Setting an Example for Others: How this Case Study Can be of Use to the UBC Graduate School of Journalism ........................................................................ 40
  6.1 Making Diversity an Even Higher Priority .................................................... 40
     6.1.1 Future Considerations ............................................................................. 42
  6.2 Teaching the Course: Calling all Thick-skinned but Intelligent and Insightful Teachers ........................................................................................................... 42
  6.3 Readings Selection............................................................................................ 45
Acknowledgements

I offer my enduring gratitude to the faculty, staff and my fellow students at the UBC Graduate School of Journalism who have inspired and accompanied me throughout the last two years. I owe particular thanks to my primary supervisor Dr. Michelle Stack, UBC Department of Educational Studies, for her invaluable contribution to my study. Her warm guidance and passion for social justice has inspired me to explore my own topic of interest in this area, and her stimulating conversations and enthusiasm for good coffee make academic research very enjoyable.

I also acknowledge my secondary supervisor, Dr. Minelle Mahtani, Department of Geography and Planning and Program in Journalism, University of Toronto, for her expertise in media and minority representation and racialized identities. Her encouragement, advice and constructive criticism have been integral to this research.

I thank Alden Habacon, Director of Intercultural Understanding Strategy Development at UBC, for that one phone conversation and interview that inspired me to take on this particular research topic. In addition, I thank my friend and UBC instructor Kathryn Gretsingr for her endless energy, compassion and encouragement, and for her unwavering faith in me. Her passion for storytelling is inspiration to us all.

Others who were integral to this research include the three interview participants. I thank them for their precious time and their candidness.

Special thanks are owed to my parents, who have supported me financially throughout my many years of education.

Last but not least, I thank my partner for his unconditional support, and for enduring this emotional journey with me from the beginning.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those who want to see a more inclusive and progressive media, and who want to work towards that future.
1 Introduction

Why would you want to alienate or ignore a growing part of the population? You know, many of the newcomers to Toronto come from areas of the world where newspaper readership is very healthy, and the press is booming, so why aren’t they reading your paper? Well, because…they were being treated like foreigners and ignored and stereotyped and they felt angry about it. So why would you give your business or spend your time with an institution that makes you angry?

—Interview with John Miller, former editor at The Toronto Star and Ryerson professor emeritus

Angry and resentful responses from readers—most of whom were Canadians of Asian descent—were what resulted in reaction to a provocative story published by Maclean’s Magazine in November 2010. The article, “Too Asian?”, implied that the increasing number of Asian students in Canadian and American universities is a cause for alarm because, supposedly, white students cannot compete with too many “hardworking, high-achieving, humourless Asians who never have any fun” (Findlay & Kohler, 2010). Condemned also by the city councils of Vancouver, Toronto and Victoria, the article was problematic in more ways than can be fully deconstructed in this paper. However, what will be discussed here is the fact that, despite the magazine’s claim that it was merely examining Canadian university admissions processes, and that the article was never meant to be racist in nature, “Too Asian?” was saturated with harmful racial stereotypes that depicted Asian-Canadians as threats to dominant white-Canadian society (Yu, 2010).

1.1 Rationale

As a Canadian journalist of Chinese descent, the racist and inflammatory nature of “Too Asian?” upset me immensely and the article inspired me to examine how journalists can be trained to cover ethno-racial minorities accurately. Specifically, this thesis will examine what Canadian journalism schools could do to educate a critical mass of new journalists that reporting
on non-white Canadians must go beyond racialization—that is, the social process by which certain groups of people are assigned particular characteristics based on a constructed, “inferiorized” racial identity (Henry & Tator, 2002). This is because Canada’s urban centres have outgrown the common sense language used to describe the country’s contemporary cultural reality. For example, second- and third-generation descendents of immigrants, foreign-born Canadians who moved to Canada at a young age, and the offspring of mixed-race couples possess such complex cultural experiences that to associate them simply with one particular race or to categorize them as a “person of colour” is entirely too generalized (Habacon, 2007). Moreover, the extensive shift in immigration patterns and policies over the last 25 years has transformed the face of major Canadian metropolitan regions so profoundly that using the term “visible minorities”¹ to describe non-white Canadians no longer makes sense. Statistics Canada has reported that by 2031, Canada’s foreign-born population will rise from 20 per cent in 2006 to 25 to 28 percent, and the vast majority of them will be settling into big cities. By 2031, what are now considered visible minorities will make up 63 per cent of Toronto’s population and 59 per cent of Vancouver’s, with the lion’s share of these non-whites being of Asian heritage. Therefore, as John Miller, an interview participant in this study, suggested in the earlier quotation, the changing demographics of Canada could mean that unless Canadian news industries produce coverage about non-white Canadians that is perceived as accurate and fair by those same people, they will look elsewhere for information.

Despite this reality, structural bias still manifests itself in the media in the sense that biased framing of racialized minorities is seen as a professional norm and need not be disputed.

---

¹ Statistics Canada uses the Employment Equity Act definition of visible minority, which is "persons, other than Aboriginal Peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." This includes Chinese, South Asians, blacks, Arabs, West Asians, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, Latin Americans, Japanese and Koreans.
Non-white Canadians are still treated as minorities in mainstream media because they are often excluded (Mahtani, 2001; Fleras & Kunz, 2001; Henry & Tator, 2002). Moreover, as is the case with “Too Asian?” they are misrepresented when they are associated with stereotypes that portray them as the “other.” Racial stereotyping in the media becomes even more controversial when taking into account the ways digital media has changed the global media landscape. In a time when globalized processes and the rise of social media means that audiences around the world have more access to a wider array of news sources than ever before, the need for accurate and fair cross-cultural and cross-religious reporting has never been greater.

Even though researchers and critical journalists have exposed the continued stereotypical portrayal of racialized minorities in Canadian mainstream media through content analyses of newspapers and radio and TV programs (Mahtani, 2001, 2008; Fleras & Kunz, 2001; Henry & Tator, 2002; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Stack, 2010) little research has been conducted in Canada on the role of journalism education in tackling racialization even though Canadian postsecondary institutions play an important role in educating future journalists. There is no doubt that digital media is rapidly changing journalists’ role as gatekeepers of information. Consumers concerned with racist coverage can now resort to outlets outside of mainstream media if they find that mainstream media is not reliable or accurate. However, people who subscribe to racist perspectives in the media, and who may share or link to sites that contain such views, can still amplify their influence. Thus, in order to overcome stereotype-based coverage, journalism educators must emphasize early on in students’ career the importance of challenging media bias when reporting on a culturally diverse society. As they do so, they must also examine the day-to-day challenges of running such a course and the emotional experiences that instructors and
students face when forced to confront their own biases and value systems while discussing racism in the media.

1.2 Research Method and Questions

This qualitative study will analyze an undergraduate journalism course taught at Ryerson University called “Critical Issues in Journalism” (formerly known as “Covering Diversity”). Introduced in 1997, “Critical Issues” was the first writing and criticism course of its kind in Canada to focus solely on teaching students how to cover race and religion. In recent years, the course has evolved so that covering diversity now includes covering racial and gender and sexuality diversity, and that diversity component is one of many topics that are taught throughout the course. Through interviews with three of the course’s instructors, including the creator of the course, this thesis will explore the following questions:

1. How do the emotions of instructors, students and faculty staff come into play when implementing this course?

2. What changes were made to the course since its initiation, and what influenced these changes?

3. How might this case study be of use to the UBC Graduate School of Journalism, a school that wants to better prepare its students to report on diversity?

1.3 Terminology

I use the terms “white” and “non-white,” “racial minorities,” “racialized minorities” and “visible minorities” often in this thesis. By “white,” I do not mean people of exclusive European descent or refer strictly to the colour of their skin. Instead, I use the term “white” in a political sense, referring to the group in Canadian society that defines its culture as dominant and the norm, while people of different colours are seen to be inferior.
I understand that the phrases “racial minorities” and “visible minorities” are problematic. As many non-white Canadians, such as Chinese-Canadians, can no longer be considered numerically as a visible minority in cities such as Vancouver and Toronto, to call them “racial minorities” is inaccurate. Similarly, to call anyone who appears to be non-white a “racial minority” is also questionable because appearances alone do not necessarily reflect a person’s racial identity. Furthermore, significant economic, political and social distinctions exist among racial minorities. More importantly, continuing to use the term “racial minority” can further entrench marginalization because those who are classified under that term are seen as the “other.” Therefore, a more suitable term may be “racialized minorities,” because it captures the fact that those who are categorized as such are only constructed as such.

Nonetheless, in the following literature review and in subsequent sections where interviewees or course documents are quoted, the term “racial minority” or “religious minorities” will be used because such terms were employed. These terms were used by participants in a generalized way to refer to people who have been subjected to differential or unequal treatment because of their physical characteristics, including but not limited to Chinese, Arabs, Jewish, Korean, Indians and Latin Americans. Similarly, interviewees also used the term “diversity” in a loose sense to refer to diversity in race, religion, gender and disability.
2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This section establishes the theoretical framework that was used in the analysis and interpretation in this study. The first section is a synthesis of literature about structural bias as it pertains to representation and narrative framing of racialized minorities in mainstream media. The second section includes literature that analyzes the prevalence of biased framing of racialized minorities. The third section of literature focuses on increasing awareness of racial bias in mainstream media through the changing of journalistic practices and journalism education.

2.1 Problematizing Minorities in Mainstream Press

Media scholars have long debated the degree to which the press perpetuates racial bias. In writing about the treatment of topics related to ethnic minorities in the press in the 1980s, Tuen van Dijk (1991) argued that mainstream media do not address the problems of minorities; instead they define minorities as the problem. Van Dijk stated that minorities are often associated with a number of stereotypical topics, such as immigration problems, crime, and violence, whereas their dealings with topics such as politics, social affairs and culture are under-reported (1991).

In Canada, a significant body of critical literature (Mahtani, 2001, 2008, 2009; Henry & Tator, 2002, 2003; Fleras & Kunz, 2001) also maintains that Canadian mainstream media often construct a distorted reflection of minority groups through the use of stereotypes and biased framing, which in turn portrays ethno-racial communities as those who pose a threat to dominant culture. According to this body of literature, what appears in media reporting is insufficient for gaining a complete and accurate understanding of ethno-racial communities due to patterns of misrepresentation that are reinforced by “slanted or stereotypical representations in media coverage” (Hier, 2008, p. 132). Such coverage narrowly represents the complexity of ethno-
racial minority achievements because minorities are often grouped into “model” or “problematic” people, with little room for the coverage of differences within the community.

While sociologist Sean Hier does not dispute the findings of these studies of racism and the media, he argued in his research of race, ethnicity and media that such literature ignores the changes and progress that Canadian mainstream media has made in promoting ethno-racial harmony, acceptance and incorporation in the country (2008). For example, he argued that in recent years, primetime television shows have increasingly casted visible minorities as characters with influential occupational or social positions (2008). Moreover, news stories that seem to “other” racialized groups—such as a 2006 article from the Globe and Mail that highlighted a family of black Canadian sisters who, despite the white privilege of Ivy League schools, earned degrees in Harvard University—can actually be seen as positive affirmations that mainstream media is highlighting the positive achievements of racial minorities and showing readers that racism in Canada is unacceptable (Hier, 2008).

On the other hand, media critics such as Minelle Mahtani, Frances Henry and Carol Tator (2008) maintain that discourses that marginalize and misrepresent racialized minorities are still pervasive in mainstream media in a way that may not always be apparent. They offered the example of a 1999 Globe and Mail story about a Parliamentarian accused of sexual assault by a Native woman. The story was situated in a Native reserve, and the reserve was described in the first four paragraphs of the article as a place where residents lived “crammed into log shacks” and “made do without running water or telephones” (qtd. in Mahtani et al., 2008, p.123). Even though the case was about an alleged sexual assault, Mahtani et al. point out that the focus was on the hardships in the Native community where the accused was stationed, thus reinforcing the stereotypical notions that Native Canadians generally lived in poverty and technological
backwardness (2008). Evidently, the framing of this story was skewed towards making the Native residents seem like degenerate human beings in order to draw sympathy towards a privileged government official whose crime would have been intolerable had he not been stationed at such a seemingly dreadful reserve.

2.2 The Prevalence of Biased Framing: Why Misrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Racialized Minorities Continue to Exist

The prevalence of biased framing can be attributed to several reasons. In an essay that drew upon his own experience as a black reporter working for white-only mainstream media and reporting on urban violence in 1960s New Jersey, Austin Long-Scott (2004) argued that the reason stories involving issues of race, class and gender are often swamped by stereotypes (in his case, African-Americans are violent criminals) is because of the way journalism is structured. First, Long-Scott argued that the ability to tell a compelling story is more highly rewarded than the ability to question common assumptions of popular culture (2004). Moreover, the deadline structure of journalism promotes speed and brevity at the expense of in-depth understanding. As a result, as Walter Lippmann also observed in Public Opinion, journalists tend to oversimplify and fall back on familiar explanations and stereotypes rather than explore complexity (2007). Stereotypes, Lippmann said, are a “standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group and representing an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment” (2007, p.7). He argued that stereotyping results from the media’s need to quickly convey information about characters and to instill in audiences expectations about characters’ actions (2007).

Similarly, Fleras and Kunz (2001) argue that media stereotyping is intrinsic to an industry that is constructed around simplifying information for audiences. Due to the limited time and
space in both print and electronic news, the mainstream media are rarely in a position to develop
complex interpretations of reality that capture various human emotions, conflict or contradiction
(Fleras & Kunz, 2001). In much of Canadian corporate media, stereotyping of racialized
minorities tends to be negative. The Maclean’s article, “Too Asian?” provides a case in point. In
the story, Asian-Canadian university students are depicted as being overly hardworking and
studious, as well as anti-social and cited as the reason why white-Canadians cannot compete for
spots (Findlay & Kohler, 2010). Newscasting in Canadian corporate media still frames racialized
minorities as people who are a problem, creates problems or pose a threat, either as vulnerable
victims, indifferent members of society, or criminals (Fleras & Kunz, 2001).

On the other end of the spectrum, Fleras and Kunz (2001) also argue that positive
coverage tends to ornamentalize minorities and cast them in roles that are meant to amuse or
embellish. Building on Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism (1978), they argue that news that
focuses on the celebration of ethnic events and festivals, or emphasize racial minorities’ status as
athletes or entertainers, serve to couple them with the exotic and sensual, and to depict them as
“congenial hosts for faraway destinations” (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p.146). Rarely do racialized
minorities just appear in mainstream media as average, normal, tax-paying Canadians doing
average, normal things.

However, Fleras and Kunz suggest that the tendency to frame minorities through
stereotypical and even racist lens is not necessarily the individual reporter's intent. Rather, the
problematizing of minorities by mainstream media is systemic and structural, not individual and
attitudinal. Newsrooms are sites of cultural production, and even though the news media tends
to see themselves as objective, the selection of frames and particular narratives are often a
“preferred interpretation’ that reflects and reinforces the interests of those who control the news
process” (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p. 72). In turn, as Donald McCombs and Malcolm Shaw (1972) suggest in their agenda-setting model of media effects, what the media decides is news is what the public recognizes as news, and what is emphasized in the news—such as the criminal activity of certain members of a minority community, for example—is often perceived as what is important.

Even when leaders of news organizations recognize the need to produce truthful and comprehensive accounts of ethnic minorities, it has been suggested that fair representation is impossible in mass media for several reasons. Again, Long-Scott (2004) pointed out that the market-driven decline in the numbers of journalists and news bureaus makes it harder for journalists to explore what’s really going on “out there,” while the consolidation of news organizations into a small number of mega-corporations discourages variety in news coverage.

The under-representation and misrepresentation of ethnic minorities could also be partly attributed to the cultural make-up of media workers. Journalists are largely bound by the dominant cultures within which they operate, and media workers often make decisions about stories, sources and images depending on their own understandings of audience composition and what the audience considers to be relevant (Mahtani, 2001). Mahtani has indicated that when the news staff and target audience are predominantly white, attempts to represent diverse cultural experiences can often be seen as too specific to be of general interest (2001).

In the case of most Canadian newsrooms, John Miller has observed that those who take leadership roles, make news decisions, and shape opinions in mainstream media are predominantly white and middle-class. In 1994, he surveyed 41 daily newsrooms across Canada, and concluded that, “in both their staffing and in how they depict minorities in print, most of Canada’s dailies are nearly as white as the paper they’re printed on” (Miller, 1994, para. 5).
Despite operating at a time when the communities they cover are increasingly diverse, Miller suggested these workers are less able or inclined to access, understand and explain the experiences of non-white elites, thus they produce coverage with blind spots (1994).

2.3 Diversifying the Newsroom

James Watson (2003) advocated that fairer, non-stereotypical and non-racist treatment of ethnic minorities in mainstream media can be achieved by more representation among those who report and present events in the news, for “until representatives of ethnic minorities become media moguls themselves,” they will continue to be misrepresented (Watson, 2003, p.199). Similarly, Miller (2004) also suggested that a change in leadership and diversification of newsroom staff could lead to more sensitive and accurate coverage. However, his 2004 survey—a follow-up to the one he conducted in 1994—of 37 Canadian newsrooms indicated that the commitment of editors to hire diversity is generally low (Miller, 2004, Discussion and Conclusions, para. 1). While many editors claimed they had a “very strong” desire to hire diverse staff, most explained the low numbers of visible minorities in their newsrooms with, “People of different races just do not apply here” and “The journalism schools don’t supply them” (Miller, 2004, Findings and Analysis, para. 5). Rather than taking steps to attract minority candidates through recruitment at journalism schools or ethnic publications, Miller pointed to how surveyed editors were shifting responsibility to minority journalists rather than taking steps to diversify the newsroom (Miller, 2004, Findings and Analysis, para.5). Without sources or reporters in minority neighbourhoods, news organizations cannot obtain accurate understanding of their different interests and grievances.

On the other hand, even in instances where racialized journalists (those who identify as members of minority racial groups) exist in mainstream newsrooms, they may refrain from
criticizing even when they witness the production of stereotypical representation (Mahtani, 2009). Between 2005 and 2008, Mahtani conducted interviews with racialized journalists in Toronto and Vancouver, who revealed that they felt images of minority groups were misleading. One journalist of Filipino descent pointed out that “98 per cent of Muslim stories have nothing to do with Muslim men praying, but we always use that same image,” and that contemporary images of Muslim women doing everyday things such as picking up their children and going grocery shopping never gets portrayed in mainstream media (Mahtani, 2009, p. 262). Despite their frustration, though, the study’s findings revealed that many racialized journalists felt they had to “sit back and swallow it, for fear of being too ‘politically correct’ or a loudmouth,” or for being seen as a troublemaker who got the job because of affirmative hiring policies (Mahtani, 2009, p. 274). In addition, Mahtani’s study revealed that some ethnic minority media workers are uncomfortable with being seen as spokespeople for their particular group, and with being perceived by their colleagues as biased (2009).

The issue is further complicated by the varied viewpoints within cultural and racial communities. Minority groups can be divided in terms of how they identify themselves, with proponents on different sides arguing for integration and assimilation, or for cultural separation and authenticity. Mahtani (2009) argued that “racialized silences” are one of the reasons why the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of racial minorities continues to be produced and tolerated. But one cannot assume that, should racialized journalists not fear being reprimanded for criticizing stereotypical depictions in the media, they would automatically produce news that is accurate and representative of everyone from their respective communities, or that they won’t buy into stereotypes as well. For example, a racialized journalist who is a second or third-generation Canadian may not be able to identify with new immigrants from the same ethnic or
cultural background. Even those new immigrants within that community could differ from each other immensely. As a result, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990) warns against essentialist representation of minority communities, for diasporic cultures can be quite different from the culture they came from originally. Therefore, to group together all members—including journalists—of the same racial background and to assume that they would be able to relate to one another is also stereotypical.

2.4 Denial of Systemic Discrimination

Finally, the misrepresentation of racial minorities, particularly the framing of them as “problem people” in Canadian media, can be seen as the manifestation of racial prejudices and racism in everyday discourse and news coverage (Hier & Greenberg, 2002). Through their research, Henry and Tator (2002) demonstrated that there remains a persistent denial of systemic racism, which is “deeply manifest in the fabric of Canadian culture and is a part of all social, economic and political systems” (p.36). In addition, they claim that the denial of racism among opinions makers is “so habitual that making the allegation of racism and raising the possibility of its influence on social outcomes becomes a serious social infraction”(Henry & Tator, 2002, p.37). As a result, those who work in the media are frequently unaware of their role in contributing to racism, and often they resist criticism of their own practices.

2.5 Overcoming Structural Bias in the News

Despite the difficulties of overcoming inaccurate and oversimplified media portrayals of racial minorities, some media scholars maintain that it can be done. Writing in the 1920s, Lippmann (2007) criticized the American public for basing their public opinions on stereotypes, which are “representations of the unseen facts” (p.85). As such, he argued that rather than relying on the press to tell the public what the truth is, the public, or an independent, expert organization,
must overcome the stereotypes and expose the unseen facts behind them. Some of Lippmann’s vision can now be seen through the rise of citizen media, where the public is forcing itself into the conversation. For example, days after the Maclean’s article, “Too Asian?” was published, a website titled, “Too Asian and Damn Proud of It!” was immediately established. According to the “About” section, the website is meant to provide a forum for Asian-Canadians to “respond and tell these ignorant white folk what it really means to be Asian” (2010). Thanks to citizen journalism and social media, journalists who claim to know what citizens care about may now quickly find out they are wrong (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2003). Like Lippmann, Todd Gitlin (2003) also challenges journalists, students of mass media and marginalized groups to challenge and transform the political and economic elite definitions of reality. Rather than accepting definitions of newsworthiness from editors, Gitlin suggests that journalists should develop their own positions about what to cover, though he did not necessarily provide strategies for how a journalist working in a mainstream news outlet might do this.

Nadyat El-Gawley, a freelance radio producer based in Sydney, Australia, has challenged the way local and national media has reported, listened to, and understood issues of race and ethnicity in Australian society. El-Gawley makes radio documentaries and features based on stories that ethnic minorities tell her about migration, life in the suburbs, racism and their encounters with the media (El-Gawley & O’Donnell, 2009). In an interview with Penny O’Connell (2009), professor of international media and journalism at the University of Sydney, El-Gawley confessed that her toughest audience is usually other journalists and executive producers who are often out of touch with the non-white communities they are reporting on. Instead, as Long-Scott has also pointed out, these journalists assume experts can explain the behaviour and needs of racial minorities better than they can explain themselves. In addition, El-
Gawley pointed out that the widespread belief that being impartial and objective, and presenting “both sides” of a story would automatically lead to the achievement of equality and fair, accurate and balanced reporting actually silences crucial perspectives in complex issues of diversity (El-Gawley & O’Donnell, 2009, p.519).

Through her radio programs, El-Gawley invites audiences to listen to people they may be afraid of, feel uncomfortable about, or have no interest in (El-Gawley & O’Donnell, 2009). Referring to a story she once did in Bankstown, a suburb in Sydney where many Lebanese-Australians live, she observed that tensions in Bankstown towards the media is apparent because “whenever the words ‘Lebanese’ and Bankstown’ were mentioned in the news, an immediate association was made with crime” (El-Gawley and O’Donnell, 2009, p.522). In response, people from that community treated journalists with hostility, thus reinforcing the notion that Bankstown people are generally aggressive. To counter this cycle, El-Gawley (2009) argued that journalists must discard the myth of objectivity and instead, spend time to engage and negotiate with the minority communities on which they are reporting, show respect for their customs, and allow them to review the interview transcripts. This way, not only will members of the minority group be able to correct any inaccurate portrayals, but they will also feel more confident in giving journalists their stories in the future.

El-Gawley emphasized that, despite the deadline-driven structure of daily news, spending time to engage with the community that a journalist is reporting on is crucial to unlearn stereotypes and produce fair and accurate coverage. In The Authentic Voice, a book on best practices in reporting on race and ethnicity, Star Tribune writer Allie Shah (2006) furthered El-Gawley’s point by noting not only the importance of writing from a community (instead of just about it), but also the importance of research. In 2000, Shah wrote a news article on Somali
teenage girls trying to reconcile their conservative cultural and religious mores with the more permissive society within which they lived in the United States. Even though Shah, being a Muslim like most Somalis, said she had a “head start” on the cultural background, she did not speak Somali or wear the hijab (p.17). Therefore, she approached her reporting by first reading and attending a crash course about Somali culture, history, religion and gender issues. She also went to Somali concerts and book readings, and she went to school, the mall and did everyday things with her sources. The knowledge and immersion allowed Shah to earn the trust of many in the Somali community and to write with an authentic and authoritative voice.

Similarly, KRON-TV producer Craig Franklin (2006) also advocated the necessity of research, source development, story production and personal growth in order to unlearn racism and develop stories about race that are accurate, fair and balanced. As a white journalist producing a series that examined the way people handled race relations in the United States, Franklin argued that all journalists must first, regardless of their skin colour and despite the discomfort, confront their ignorance about people from racial backgrounds different from their own, and question their own biases and the rules of objective journalism (2006). Only then will they be able to appreciate and understand the complexities of race relations, and to search for ways to frame those complexities into stories that would make sense to viewers and readers.

At the industry level, another way to stop the sensationalized and biased reporting on matters of race and ethnicity is to “mainstream diversity”—that is, to institutionalize a more positive and realistic portrayal of minority men and women into a news organization (Fleras & Kunz, 2001, p.164). Fleras and Kunz argue that a simple incorporation of minority men and women into the newsroom is not enough. Rather, newsroom practices must proactively and positively engage with diversity as different, yet equal, and to promote differences as necessary,
normal, and beneficial without ignoring the need to address disadvantages that minorities confront (2001). Some progress towards internal reform has been evident in Canada. Since August 2001, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has required that broadcasters submit corporate plans for cultural diversity that include initiatives designed to achieve these goals (“Cultural Diversity on Television”, 2003). Such initiatives include commitments to corporate accountability, the reflection of diversity in programming, and the solicitation of effective feedback from viewers (“Cultural Diversity on Television”, 2003). To date, the CBC, for example, has implemented reforms including sensitivity training for program and production staff, language guidelines to reduce stereotypes, the monitoring of on-air representation of racial minorities and the hiring of journalists from different racial backgrounds.

2.6 The Role of Journalism Education in Unlearning Racial Stereotypes

Another fundamental method to better represent ethnic and racial minorities in the media is improved journalism education, which is the focus of this study. In 2008, representatives from various US journalism and mass communications schools who had been successful in implementing a particular program that contributed to diversity on campus came together to discuss how these programs were organized and executed, and the challenges that they faced in implementation. The conference, organized by the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University, provided recommendations about diversity as it relates to faculty, students, leadership and research.

In the conference’s report, Sally Lehrman, director and national diversity chair for the Society of Professional Journalists, noted that accurate and fair coverage has always been crucial to good journalism. By excluding different perspectives from different people in the community, she argued, what is being reported and what is being taught in many classrooms cannot be
considered accurate or fair (Lehrman, 2008). Without change, journalists are then reinforcing unconscious and reflexive “truths” that are not true (Lehrman, 2008, p.12). Lehrman argued that understanding unconscious bias, structural racism and institutional bias is integral to every journalist and educator’s toolbox. However, “achieving academic diversity is like trying to move mountains” because of a lack of time for talking about better practices and a lack of appreciation for diversity’s relevance to higher education (Lehrman, 2008, p.10). More problematic is the prevailing view that the inequities that journalists and educators are trying to address are over (p.10). As a result, the lack of diverse voices in the newsroom is linked to the lack of diversity in journalism education.

The *Maclean’s* article, “Too Asian?” previously cited, in which the generalizations of Asian-ness and whiteness are taken as truths, illustrates Lehrman’s point about the way journalists deny the existence of systemic inequality. The authors cite “hard data” that indicates Asian students work harder, tend to be strivers, high achievers and single-minded in their approach to university, and are more likely to pick universities that specialize in math, science and business (Findlay & Kohler, 2010). By contrast, white students, the authors write, “are more likely to choose universities and build their school lives around social interaction, athletics and self-actualization and yes, alcohol” (Findlay & Kohler, 2010). The authors, like many other journalists, appear to be unaware that what they are citing are stereotypes. Therefore, journalism educators must step in to teach journalists to counter such assumptions.

Essed observes, “when…racism is transmitted in routine practices that seem ‘normal’, at least for the dominant group, this can only mean that racism is not often recognized, not acknowledged—let alone problematized by the dominant group” (10). Again, the *Maclean’s* article illustrates this point. The two students who were interviewed are convinced that not
selecting a university that is “too Asian,” is not an issue of racism, but merely a matter of choice (Findlay & Kohner, 2008). Neither the two interviewees, who were given the pseudonyms Alexandra and Rachel, nor the authors appear to be aware that they are exhibiting structural bias. Such bias is what the Poynter Institute’s Keith Woods regards as the “unconscious, unexamined and rationalized stereotypes that masquerade as knowledge” (Perry, 2008, p.125). Thus, it is up to the journalist to work against them and to “rise above fears of human difference so they can tell a story that is not merely voyeuristic, but unveils the universal truths within that difference” (Perry, 2008).

Arlene Morgan of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism offers a framework to do that, because “anyone who contemplates diversity education in a journalism classroom or newsroom must first examine the perspectives he or she brings to the profession before systemic issues that prevent an honest and authentic style of reporting can be mitigated” (Morgan, 2008, p.131). First, Morgan indicates that a “safe” haven for people to discuss uncomfortable issues surrounding diversity must be established so that they can speak their minds respectfully and not be reprimanded (2008, p.134). In Morgan’s book, *The Authentic Voice* (2006), co-author Alice Pifer recommended lesson plans that incorporate Robert C. Maynard’s Fault Lines theory. In the 1960s, Maynard, a former reporter, ombudsman, editorial writer and the first African American to own a mainstream American newspaper, identified five “Fault Lines” that are essential to consider if journalists want to produce a story that accurately represents the entire community regardless of the issue: race (including ethnicity), gender (including sexual orientation), class, geography and age (Miller & Hsu, 2008). By asking students to apply the Fault Lines concepts when writing stories, they are forced to confront their own biases, and to realize who is being left out. However, Miller and Hsu argue that no list ever applies to every person, organization or
community at all times (2008). Each community has its own Fault Lines, and both journalists and teachers need to be aware of the issues, such as religion, political orientation and immigration, that are important locally and to apply them as they produce stories (Miller & Hsu, 2008).

Morgan and Pifer (2006) also advocate that students be challenged to find sources or settings that are outside of their comfort zone so they can include a number of viewpoints and cultures. However, they point out that it is important not to presume that reporters of certain colours and ethnic backgrounds automatically know how to cover their communities. Furthermore, educators should integrate race and ethnicity coverage into the fundamental reporting and writing course by devoting one major segment to teaching diversity coverage, and invite experts, reporters and editors who are doing best-practice work to give guest lectures and help students conceptualize the importance of including context and voice to complex subjects.

Bearing in mind this framework of racial bias in the mainstream press and the merits and challenges of incorporating race coverage into journalism education, the following sections will examine how one Canadian journalism school has tried to tackle race coverage through the course, “Critical Issues in Journalism.”
3 Course Introduction

In 1997, the Ryerson School of Journalism in Toronto introduced “Covering Diversity,” a mandatory undergraduate writing and criticism course created by John Miller, a former editor at a large Toronto daily newspaper. Its objective was to teach journalism students how to develop a strategy to fairly and accurately cover matters of race and religion, to frame stories about Toronto’s many racial communities in a manner that is non-stereotypical, to include stories both about achievements and conflicts within these communities, and to pitch racial diversity stories to the professional media (See Appendix A for course syllabus).

Eventually, the course evolved both in name and content—it became “Critical Issues in Journalism,” and no longer focused solely on racial diversity coverage. Instead, “Critical Issues” encompassed several things: beat reporting; covering racial minorities, people with disabilities and gay and lesbian people; and critical analysis of controversial issues in mainstream media, such as democracy, cultures of impunity, foreign correspondence, media ownership and citizen journalism. The course is also no longer compulsory. Most recently taught by Joy Luk and a co-teacher in the winter term of 2010, and Kali Ma in the fall term of 2010, “Critical Issues” aimed to teach students to question journalistic practices that may fall short of core journalistic values such as fairness, accuracy and context, and to identify pitfalls in their own reporting (See Appendix B and Appendix C for course syllabi). Throughout the rest of this paper, this course will be referred to as “Critical Issues.”

---

2 Note: a pseudonym chosen by the interview participant is used here.

3 Note: a pseudonym chosen by the interview participant is used here.
3.1 Significance of the Course

As a former editor of the *Toronto Star*, Miller said he realized only after he left the paper just how much stereotyping is part of news judgment.

As soon as you get assigned a story, you immediately start limiting it. You generally say, “Oh it’s one of those stories.” That limits who you talk to, it limits your perspective on the story and unless you learn to delay framing a story, then you’ll never get to the real story, and that needs a lot of attention (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

All three interview participants agreed that “getting to the real story,” particularly when it concerns minority communities, requires getting past clichés. Instead, journalism students need to first understand why stereotyping of minorities exist, why it is problematic, and most importantly, when they becoming practicing journalists, how to ensure their stories reflect the reality and nuances of these communities.

3.1.1 Confronting Structural Bias

The curriculum of “Critical Issues” was initially based upon research on diversity coverage that Miller had conducted on behalf of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association. It was also influenced by the problematic coverage of a random robbery in 1994—a case that was brought up again in the *Toronto Star* this January. Seventeen years ago, three young black men robbed a trendy midtown café in Toronto called Just Desserts, and shot a 23-year-old white female to death (Tyler, 2011).

All of a sudden the papers were publishing grainy police surveillance camera shots that only showed the skin was black. You couldn’t make out any identifying features and the media just went off and said, “This is US-style urban warfare come to Canada.” It was sort of a moral panic response. And I’d done a sort of an analysis on that media coverage and I said, “You know, this can’t go on. We’ve got to make our coverage more sophisticated than this” (Miller, personal communications, January 21, 2011).

As a result, he decided that students needed to learn skills on how to cover cross-cultural and cross-religious issues. Thus, Miller developed and taught the first “Critical issues” course at
Ryerson. Subsequent instructor, Luk, argued that such skills are necessary because racism and systemic discrimination in Canadian mainstream media continues to persist in newer and subtler forms—often in a seemingly innocent way. As a result, it is important that instructors train journalists of the future to tackle editorial decisions that may lead to biased or inaccurate storytelling.

It is important because [racism] is so insidious. Of course people don’t do the overt stuff. You don’t—you can’t be overtly racist in your coverage, but where we’re at right now, I think in Canada, is the subtle stuff is not questioned (Luk, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

Referring to the Maclean’s article, “Too Asian?”, where Asian-Canadian university students were labeled as being smart, but socially awkward (Findley & Kohler, 2010), Luk said:

The problem with any kind of racial stereotype is it can flip any way. I mean, of course it’s better to be called smart than dumb, because some minorities are considered to be dumb, so it’s nice to be considered smart, except it’s still a stereotype and it hurts people. And also, it’s another way of making you the ‘other.’ You’re not part of the mainstream, you’re the ‘other,’ you’re the people who are smart, who aren’t any fun and you’re taking our spots (Luk, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

Ma also agreed that racism in the mainstream media could be quite inferential.

You can have somebody who is a very nice person, who is a good journalist, a good professional journalist, a good editor, but still falls into the pitfalls of creating or allowing an article like ‘Too Asian?’ in Maclean’s to go through (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

Here, both Luk and Ma point to institutional bias and the process of “othering” in mainstream media. Fleras and Kunz (2001) argued that in Canada, a country that is widely seen to be socially progressive, racist concepts have shifted from an emphasis on discriminatory laws and deliberate exclusion to an emphasis on covert expressions that are embedded in institutions such as the media. For example, negative or resentful comments about a particular racialized group may not be seen as racist, but merely a genuine reflection of ignorance, fear or bad manners on the part of the speaker. Hence, why the authors and sources in “Too Asian?” could easily claim the term,
“Too Asian” is not about racism, only that “many white students simply believe that competing with Asians—both Asian Canadians and international students—requires a sacrifice of time and freedom they’re not willing to make” (Findlay & Kohler, 2010).

In this example, it is clear that both Luk and Ma sympathize with the authors of “Too Asian?” and imagine that it was never their intent to offend people. When such is the case, Ma emphasized the importance of getting students to critically examine the socialization of themselves, to identify their own points of privilege, and to understand how their identities influence their reporting, for biased coverage does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, they are a result of many different societal processes that rationalize stereotypes and misconceptions. By discussing these processes throughout her course, such as the factors that influence an editor’s decision to leave some stories in while others out, the implications for news coverage when media chains dominate a region, the depiction of racial minorities and the coverage of the gay, lesbian and trans-gendered communities in corporate media, Ma said students can develop a holistic understanding of how biased coverage is created, and how to make an argument for change.

You’re only asking them to think about it, and you’re also asking them to understand that in the classroom, some people are right—extreme right, some people are racist, some people are extreme left, and the idea that will be the same in the newsroom. And that hopefully, you can have a debate that is intelligent and informed and have a way to sort of respond to an editor—you know, have a way to walk in and have some ammunition, that if you are somebody who wants to help to build a more progressive media, then how do you start to articulate that (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011)?

Luk pointed out that the course can only go so far, though. While instructors can point out the blind spots of media coverage and can try to help students avoid falling into those same traps, at the end, the most important lesson students need to learn about covering minority issues is that it is not easy. As they go out into different communities to scoop out stories and interview
people for an assignment, they will most likely meet resistance from the community they are covering, and failure, Luk said.

I think it makes students stop and think a lot when they’re dealing with real people who are going to be sensitive about something, or angry about something. This is the best way to learn, is to get thrown into a tough story. And the good thing is, of course, is it’s a class assignment so if they make a big mistake, they’re not going to get fired from their job or the newspaper isn’t going to be investigated by the press council (Luk, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

3.1.2 Making Stories Relevant to the Community is Good Business

As Miller’s quote from the introduction indicated, reflecting your community accurately is simply a part of good journalism. He and Luk both argued that if Canadian media does not catch up with demographic realities, the industry may soon go out of business.
4 Facing Discomfort, Hostility and Disappointment: The Role of Emotions in Implementing This Course

Structural bias is prevalent not only in newsrooms, but in classrooms and education institutions as well (Stack, 2010). Miller acknowledged that when it comes to talking about race and religion, there tends to be “armed camps” because the conversation forces people to question societal norms, their identity, their privilege and biases. The discomfort could lead to hostility. Thus, for some of the “Critical Issues” instructors, challenging this bias within the classroom and the faculty has been an emotional struggle.

Certainly, most jobs require people to manage their emotions in some way, such as holding back anger at a boss, overcoming fear of presenting in front of clients, or swallowing hurtful comments or criticism from colleagues (Harlow, 2003). For the “Critical Issues” instructors, teaching a course about race and the media often involved managing frustration, anger, anxiety, a sense of isolation and hurt. Miller experienced overt resistance from students and faculty staff from the get-go. As a result, his experience served as a cautionary tale for following instructors such as Luk and Ma. Neither of them was directly involved in confrontations with other faculty members and students, but both instructors felt that teaching this course comes with baggage and as a result, they had to tweak the curriculum to accommodate.

4.1 Confronting Angry Students

Miller realized early on from his students’ exaggerated body language—jumping over things and slamming doors—that they were not comfortable with talking about issues of race and privilege, and they tended not to relate this discussion to journalism. He noted that many white students felt the course was aimed to make them feel guilty for being white, while non-white
students resented being singled out when all they wanted was to fit in with Canadian society. Other times, Miller was accused of trying to be “politically correct” for teaching students to write certain stories just to appease a group that is left out of mainstream media coverage. He was also resented for being “a white guy trying to be a black guy,” while Ma, on the other hand, who is a relatively young instructor of colour, was seen as having some kind of special interest in teaching about racial bias. She struggled to get past students’ defensiveness when they felt that she was challenging their sense of privilege and entitlement.

If there’s nobody else who looks like me at the school of journalism, and everybody else is 55 plus and is white and has grey hair, then when they see me at the front of the classroom, then I don’t seem like an authority figure. So that’s problematic to begin with. They have an easier time challenging me, for example, so the way that students speak to me is different (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

For instance, Ma said she has had students speak to her in disrespectful tones during lectures. While it was hurtful, she shrugged it off as, “It is the way it is.”

My students feel comfortable enough to challenge me, which I think is good, but comfortable enough to challenge me in a non-respectful way is a different thing… But I also—I mean, it is the way it is—their point of privilege, they think they can speak to me that way…Students do get defensive and they do feel a sense of entitlement and privilege because they are entitled and privileges in society in general (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

Ma noted, for example, that getting her students to complete one major class assignment was an exasperating experience. They really pushed back on it at first and refused to work with each other as she had requested. Other times, they questioned her knowledge and the validity of her lecture material, claiming that they “knew all about it” and did not learn anything new from her course. As a result, Ma felt she had to make an extra effort to appear authoritative and qualified. For example, when students asked for deadline extensions, she always said no because she felt she had to “maintain a level of authority that others may not.”
Other times, students confronted the instructors outright. Luk noted her co-teacher had a student say to her face that she was a terrible teacher—an incident that caused her co-teacher to be rather distressed. When Miller brought in a guest speaker from the Canadian Islamic Congress, students accused him of hosting anti-Semitic and intolerant people. He also noted that sometimes, their anger would overcome them. This was evident during the years when he gave students a final exam, and some students wrote provocative answers in response to an article filled with problematic stereotypes just to protest against the course.

However, the most shocking experience for Miller occurred during his first year of teaching “Critical Issues,” when the students’ hostility translated into a petition that was sent to the chair of the program to abolish the class altogether.

I said, “Jeez, good thing I have tenure because if I didn’t, I’d be totally intimidated.” The normal first reaction if students don’t like a class or teacher or way of teaching is to take it up in class, you know? Or come in and say, “I’m having real trouble with the way you’re teaching the class.” But to abolish the class, right off the bat—that just doesn’t happen (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

The course remained part of the journalism program at Ryerson, but as a result of this petition, Miller said he tweaked the course slightly in order to address some of his students’ grievances about topics and assignments. However, he maintained that the “opposition was quite there” until he retired.

4.2 Showdown with Faculty Members

Another unique experience for Miller alone was faculty opposition to his course. Again, he had anticipated that not every teacher in the journalism program would agree with a course focused solely on covering diversity. It would be the first of its kind to be taught in a Canadian journalism school, and many teachers simply said that the course was not necessary, and were quite impartial. However, this indifference turned into a confrontation when one year, one of
Miller’s students did a content analysis for an assignment, and chose *The Ryerson Review of Journalism*, a magazine produced by students and an instructor at the School of Journalism. This student examined the magazine’s covers over an extended period of time and concluded that the covers did not portray racial diversity because only photos of white people were ever published on the covers. The student then presented the analysis to the *Review*’s instructor and asked for an explanation.

According to Miller, the instructor replied, “Well, there’s research that shows that, you know, if you put a person who’s black on the cover of a magazine, it doesn’t sell as well.”

Aggravated, Miller then encouraged his student to challenge that assumption. He had wanted this instructor to produce evidence that supports this claim, but this example also indicates his determination to challenge the kind of racist thinking that seemed so entrenched in his faculty. However, it caused the *Review*’s instructor and others who taught magazine-writing to “one-by-one gang up” on him during a curriculum review.

They said—they quoted from my student’s paper, and they said, “This is just—this is just bullshit because we’ve written stories on diversity. How can you teach a course like this?” It shocked everybody, you know, that they would gang up so publicly on a student’s work and a fellow faculty member’s course. If that is allowed to happen in a faculty, it has an effect. It becomes a controversial course, it becomes not—you know, it becomes a course that nobody wants to teach. If they want to teach or they’re assigned to teach it, they’ll probably change it (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

To Miller’s disappointment, that in fact happened. When it was time for him to pass on the course, his successors declined his offer of lecture notes and research material and instead, rearranged the course curriculum. He lamented the loss of his original course and attributed the circumstances to lack of interest and support within the faculty.

You only have so much energy. One person on a faculty only has so many oars they can put in the water and change things. This course actually grew out of my research and my thinking in teaching the course to an initially hostile audience over seven or eight years…And so all that was lost and it’s really no surprise that the course changed
drastically after that...if nobody was interested in knowing what the course was based on in the first place (Miller, personal communication, February 21, 2011).

Ma was one of the subsequent instructors who revamped the course, particularly after she was told that students had reacted poorly the previous term because her predecessors had been too assertive about the existence of racism and sexism in the media. Ma was also too aware of how her identity as a female professor of colour could influence the way students perceive her. She had refused to teach this class when it was offered to her several years ago, partly because she had been the only person of colour in the School of Journalism then. She did not want to be the token professor to teach diversity issues because “students tend to get very defensive when learning about things like—when you try to teach something that is either anti-racist or feminist.”

Ma indicated that she has tried to express this problem to fellow professors, but many do not understand her dilemma because they cannot relate. Her experience sheds light on the existence of institutionalized bias within the school of journalism. On the one hand, as a professor of colour, she was essentialized as the expert on “diversity issues” and was expected to be the one who can teach students all there is to know about how to cover different racial and cultural groups in a fair and accurate way. On the other hand, she understood that even if she did possess such knowledge, given that she is a visible minority in the journalism school, students may perceive her to be threatening if she teaches about power and privilege in mainstream media, and about how students’ sense of privilege can affect their reporting.

4.3 Factoring Student and Faculty Reactions into Curriculum Decisions: Taking the Path of Least Resistance

Given the tension and emotional strain, Miller generalized that teaching this course can produce anxiety, particularly for untenured professors and professors of colour. As a result, they
may choose to change the course in order to meet less opposition. Ma appeared to have done as such when she revised the curriculum in 2010. Rather than focus only on diversity (which, in her case, included racial, religious and gender diversity) she also included concepts like journalism’s role in democracy, cultures of impunity, corporate consolidation of news and the role of social media (see Appendix C for syllabus). The idea, she said, was to start with universal concepts with which students all agree, and about which they will be less likely to get defensive—such as the idea that a journalist should not be killed for speaking out against an oppressive government. Only after students have built a consensus, about halfway through the term, did they explore more controversial topics such as covering race and gender diversity.

Despite the course changes, instructors did not necessarily have any easier of a time teaching it. Luk said her predecessor got “very depressed teaching it” and “everybody hated it, and everybody seemed to want to get out of it.” She also said that when she contacted previous instructors for information, they gave her a shocked, “Oh my God, you’re teaching that?” Miller also admitted wearily that he “went through a lot,” teaching this course:

When there were troubles in the course, my teaching ratings went way down because people were angry. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy—there was this shared feeling among students that, you know, there was a problem course and therefore they better rate it pretty lowly. Now I have a pretty thick skin and it wasn’t going to affect my employment but I just said, “God help it if an untenured professor gets this course because they’re going to run the other way,” and that in fact is just what happened (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

Evidently, teaching such a course was not simply about implementing a curriculum with a particular agenda to teach students how to overcome racial bias in their own reporting. Rather, the instructors realized that trying to change students’ minds about certain issues was very difficult. For example, Luk indicated that a lot of her students insisted they do not see much sexism in the media, therefore they do not understand the problem. Nonetheless, both Luk and
Ma agreed that some skepticism was healthy because it stimulated discussion and pushed students to explore an issue and question general assumptions rather than to just take certain journalistic practices for granted. The point, Ma argued, was not for students to necessarily agree with the instructor’s point of view or with each other, but to inform students about controversial issues related to mainstream media so they can draw their own questions and conclusions.

You leave everything as a question and therefore students are able to make their own conclusions. If you walk away still thinking, ‘Well I think it’s perfectly fine’—I mean, you’re not going to change everybody’s minds (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

Miller, however, was quite disappointed. For one thing, the course that he had set out to establish no longer exists in its original form because it has been “erased from the collective culture of the School of Journalism.” For another, he lamented, “The [students] who decided that it was bullshit, they probably didn’t learn very much. We failed them.”

Furthermore, the course forced instructors to question their own biases and their own reasons for teaching such a course—something that often put them in an awkward position and caused them to feel exasperated. Miller, who is a middle-aged white male, said students rated his course poorly, with comments such as, “It’s such a lousy course because Miller is a white guy who wants to be a black guy.”

But I was always conscious and I said, “Look, you know, I can’t teach this course as a guilty white guy, and I certainly don’t feel like a guilty white guy, that’s not where I’m coming from.” And so I always had to make it clear why I was coming to this course, and when I chose teaching assistants I tried to have racial diversity in them so that you know, we’d be presenting different perspectives (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

However, it was never as simple as that, because when instructors are too passionate about topics related to their own background and expertise, they can end up being biased as well.
Luk, who is also a female professor of colour, said she never experienced any kind of negativity from students regarding her race and gender. However, she was conscious that her personal experience influenced the way she taught. For example, because she had experienced depression herself, she insisted that the ignorance of mainstream media when it comes to reporting on people with illnesses like schizophrenia must be addressed in class so that students do not fall into stereotypes and end up promoting prejudice in their stories.

You have to be objective. You cannot be an advocate, really...you're still a journalist. You have to see the weaknesses and problems with coverage that is biased, but, I mean, you can swing around the other way and be biased yourself, be pro-women or pro-Chinese, so that's the danger (Luk, personal Communication, January 27, 2011).

It is apparent then, that teaching a course such as “Critical Issues” is not merely about the mechanics of devising a course curriculum, assigning readings and case studies and marking assignments. Rather, instructors must take into account the kind of emotions such a course will rile up in students, the influence of faculty politics, as well as their own emotions and biases. All of these things will affect how the course is taught, and whether it will be taught effectively.
5 From Being Ghettoized to Being Holistic: Course Changes over the Years

“Critical Issues,” last taught by Ma in 2010, is now designed to expose students to a myriad of controversial issues that challenge the role of journalists, but the course was not always set up that way. As previously noted, the course changed over the years as different instructors took over. Instructors adapted the curriculum according to their own interests or expertise, but this chapter will examine how Miller, Luk and Ma also changed the curriculum in response to student and faculty reactions, as well as out of faculty obligations.

5.1 Curriculum Changes

As previously noted, the curriculum of “Critical Issues” was originally based on Miller’s research in problematic coverage of racialized minorities in mainstream media and his strong belief that journalists needed to learn skills on how to accurately cover cross-cultural and cross-religious issues. At first, it was a mandatory course because Miller wanted to reach every student in the journalism program. Due to student resentment, however, the class became an elective instead. Miller’s focus has always been on racism in Canadian mainstream media. Therefore, each week, students would look at topics such as racial and religious stereotyping in the media, racial profiling, and covering differences within ethnic communities. Case studies were also assigned to get small group discussions going and stimulate students to think of questions that may arise.

While Luk’s course was structured in a similar way, her curriculum was a mixture of teaching students beat reporting and critical issues in journalism. She and her co-instructor picked twelve different topics to teach over the course of the term, and the topics were categorized under “Covering Diversity,” “Beats/Genres,” and “Other Issues” (See Appendix B). Under “Covering Diversity,” Luk and her co-teacher focused on race, gender and physical and
mental disabilities—the first and last of which are topics Luk is passionate about. However, Luk said the curriculum was structured this way only because she had inherited the syllabus from a previous teacher, and she and her co-teacher felt obligated to follow it.

In Luk’s opinion, jumping around every week to a different topic was problematic because some of the topics, such as citizen journalism, had little to do with other topics such as sports reporting. More importantly, she argued that this “one-issue-a-week garbage” was too superficial because there was little time to cover each topic as in-depth as she would have liked. It is for this reason that Miller designed the original “Critical Issues” to be a 13-week course focused solely on covering racial and religious diversity. He argued that students needed to be given adequate time to get their heads around race and religion, but the concepts that they learn should enable them to cover other issues such as gender and sexuality diversity.

Ma disagreed. Even though she conceded that it is difficult to comprehensively cover each of the 13 topics in her syllabus, she believes taking this holistic approach allows students to draw connections between topics such as democracy, press freedoms, media ownership, race and ideology, and digital challenges to journalism. For example, by looking at corporate consolidation of media, students learn that this could mean fewer independent voices, which could result in biased coverage. This way, Ma said, students will obtain a bigger picture of how things like socialization, global and local flows of ideas and cultures, power and identity politics can affect how they approach and report on a certain community. Through this awareness, students can then become more conscious journalists and will not fall into the pitfalls of stereotyping and misrepresentation.

Moreover, she said, students will learn that axes of identity, such as race, gender, class and sexual orientation do not occur in a vacuum. In fact, they intersect with each other, and such
intersections can be apparent in any beat, including sports and fashion. In her class, Ma integrated sports reporting into a discussion about racism by offering the example of Ben Johnson, and how he was identified by mainstream media as a “Canadian Olympic gold medalist,” and then as a “Jamaican from Scarborough” when he was stripped of his gold medal.

5.2 From Being Ghettoized to Being Holistic

Ma added that covering racial diversity is important, but she saw Miller’s original curriculum as simply a course that taught students to survey the city’s ethnicities, to report on communities with which they are not familiar, and to be sensitive to various religions and communities. She argued that if the course was structured this way, students will develop essentialized views of communities rather than an understanding of the social and historical context that shape such communities, and how the power and privilege of certain people can influence media coverage of others who are traditionally marginalized.

Teaching somebody about Gerrard Street and Little India does not teach them about racism, or, you know, systemic discrimination issues. It simply teaches them there’s a South Asian community in Toronto and what their issues might be. It has some value but it’s not—to me it’s not critical thinking and it’s not anti-racist thinking, doesn’t look at it from a sociological perspective at all (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

Here, Miller defended his original conceptualization of the course, claiming that the aim was always to get students to be critical of some of the bad habits, such as stereotyping, that journalists resort to when reporting on race and religion. He also emphasized the importance of the civic mapping assignment in getting students to recognize that many communities, white or otherwise, are not monolithic. For this assignment, students were required to go into a community they knew nothing about, and where they were a visible minority and seen as an outsider. The goal was for students to find out “who’s who” and “what’s what,” in that community, and to find under-reported stories about these communities. Through this
assignment, students were also able to find out whether factions existed within the community they’re mapping, and how these differences were defined.

And they could be the difference between Canadian-born Chinese and Hong Kong-born Chinese. There [are] cultural divides that are quite—they play out in what people wear, you know, where they hang out (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

Nonetheless, Ma’s criticism is worth noting because, as Mahtani (2008) has concluded, reporting on “fluffy” pieces such as the celebration of ethnic events and festivals is not any less problematic than coverage that associates certain racialized groups with crime and violence. Mahtani argued that such “light coverage” only promotes “staged ethnic representations,” where the highlighting of different food, family and personal and religious practices are seen as a snapshot of cultures when in fact, each individual culture is fluid and varied (p.652).

5.3 From a Separate Diversity Course to Incorporating Diversity into the Curriculum

As stated earlier, another significant change to the course since its introduction is that the diversity component now includes gender diversity and covering people with physical and mental disabilities in addition to racial diversity. In addition, several weeks of the term rather than the entire term is devoted to teaching the diversity component. Again, for Luk, this was simply the curriculum she had inherited, and for Ma, it was a conscious decision to change the course content. However, Ma said she also did it out of obligation to her faculty chair (“It’s very difficult to say no to your chair who asked you personally to teach a course”), who had decided to revise the journalism curriculum. The faculty chair, she said, had felt that Miller’s original course was a “ghettoized idea of covering diversity,” and instead, they wanted something that was more post-modern, more rooted in critical thinking and theory, and that was woven throughout the entire program and curriculum.
5.3.1 Importance of Driving Diversity into Journalism’s DNA

In Ma’s opinion, embedding a diversity component in not only “Critical Issues”, but in every journalism course in the program is much better than just having a course singled out as, “This is the class we talk about race in the media or diversity.” She argued that race permeates all kinds of issues covered by the media, and all instructors should be encouraged to integrate this component into their teaching. Both Miller and Luk agreed. In fact, Miller said ”Critical Issues” was created as a separate course originally only because the issue of race was not being approached in other reporting classes.

The long term plan was to you know, get it to the point where the students in that course were really breaking good stories that were getting published and show to the rest of the school this should be an element of all reporting classes. Eventually it was going to be part of other courses, but it never got to that point. There was hostility or indifference on the part of the rest of the faculty and looking back, I probably could have done a better job to sell it to the rest of the faculty (Miller, personal communication, February 21, 2011).

Luk added that because most journalism schools in Canada draw their instructors from a pool of journalists who are mostly white, middle-aged men, many are not partial to the idea, or even competent or knowledgeable enough to incorporate a discussion of racial diversity into their teaching.

The reality is that unless you’re consciously—as an instructor, unless you’re consciously considering the diversity aspect of an issue, it’s going to be gone, it’s going to be lost. And I think that’s the problem with newsrooms, is that they don’t consciously think about this. That’s why we get all the mental illness stories about white people, that’s why we get business stories mainly about white people (Luk, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

Here, Luk reflected upon the same conclusion that Mahtani (2001) did. Journalists are largely bound by the dominant cultures within which they operate. Therefore, their story ideas, and their choices of framing, sources, quotes and images are influenced by their own socialization, personal experiences and understanding of the world around them (Mahtani, 2001).
As Luk pointed out, when news staff are predominantly white, then their experience with or knowledge of cultural experiences different from their own can be limited.

Given this reality, Luk concluded that even though it would be most ideal to have the diversity component permeate entire courses in a journalism school, she does not believe the majority of journalism teachers in Canada have reached that point yet. As a result, she believes a separate course focused solely on diversity in race, gender and sex, and ability is necessary.
6 Setting an Example for Others: How this Case Study Can be of Use to the UBC Graduate School of Journalism

The UBC Graduate School of Journalism recognizes that teaching meaningful diversity is a crucial determinant of excellence in education for students who will become practicing journalists in the future. As a result, the school has been actively recruiting more graduate students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and with diverse interests and specializations. It has also recently appointed a faculty member who is a member of the Tahltan Nation as assistant professor. The School has also previously hosted a guest speaker from CBC to speak about diversity initiatives in the CBC newsrooms, as well as members of the Asian-Canadian Journalist Association (ACJA). Furthermore, similar to Ma’s course syllabus, a diversity aspect has purposely been included in the school’s core journalism class, “Integrated Journalism” and in the course, “Media Ethics and Leadership,” where two of the 13 topics specifically look at “Gender, Class, Justice” and “Race, Ethnicity and Indigeneity.”

6.1 Making Diversity an Even Higher Priority

This study suggests that there are ways in which teaching diversity coverage can be strengthened at the UBC J-School. Certainly, inclusivity is important in everything taught on a university campus. Therefore, it may appear to be more ideal to have courses that include a diversity element rather than a specific course on diversity, for if students are continually exposed to and educated about the importance of understanding race and culture, that insight may become a natural part of the journalism they produce. However, given that the problematization of racialized minorities is still so prominent in Canadian mainstream media today, it appears that learning to cover diversity well may require both a separate course on
diversity to develop in-depth understanding, and infusing diversity issues in the rest of the curriculum in a meaningful manner.

Given that the UBC J-School is a graduate school, both instructors and students are expected to exhibit professional, respectful behaviour and demonstrate an aptitude for journalism. As a result, a separate course on covering diversity issues at the graduate level may be less likely to generate the kind of negative or defensive responses that were experienced at the undergraduate level, as was the case with Ryerson University. Moreover, if it was an elective rather than a compulsory course, instructors may be able to filter out those students who resent being in a class in which they have no interest. Nonetheless, instructors must be aware that topics such as race and gender are often difficult for anyone (including the instructor him/herself) to talk about. Therefore, whether the School establishes a separate course on diversity coverage or incorporates a diversity component into all courses, instructors must establish a safe environment for people to honestly express their feelings, or ask uncomfortable or awkward questions without fear of being reprimanded by their colleagues.

However, as Miller demonstrated, a separate course on diversity coverage affects not only students, but faculty members as well. Just as there is institutional bias in news organizations, the same exists among journalism schools. Thus, it is equally important for faculty to stand united behind this course, or at the very least, remain open-minded to the idea so that faculty politics will not affect the course’s impact on students. Therefore, all staff members must be fully committed to including this course into the journalism program and infusing a diversity aspect into their own individual courses. Moreover, the program must fully understand that the nature of the course content, as the Ryerson instructors have demonstrated, could generate low course evaluations from students. Thus, for a separate course to have impact, it may be necessary
to ensure that while instructors should accept constructive criticism from students and make improvements to their teaching, the evaluations would not count against their promotion or tenure.

6.1.1 Future Considerations

If the UBC J-School were to include such a course solely on covering diversity, then the faculty must think about the following: what kind of readings should be assigned? What kind of teaching strategies would they use? What does “diversity” really mean? Who can teach this course, and what must the instructor be prepared for in order to teach it effectively?

And if the UBC J-School were to include a diversity component into all journalism courses instead, as they are doing currently, and want to further improve that aspect, then the faculty must think about the following: how can all instructors incorporate that component into their readings, assignments and class discussions? How must the instructor prepare in advance in order to teach this part of the course effectively?

And finally, regardless of which option the school chooses, faculty also need to think about the more practical and structural aspects of the course: when should this course be offered—during first or second year, first or second term? Should it be a mandatory course or an elective? Should it for only one term, or for two?

To offer some recommendations, the following sections will draw upon the experiences and advice of the three “Critical Issues” professors.

6.2 Teaching the Course: Calling all Thick-Skinned but Intelligent and Insightful Teachers

In previous sections, it became apparent that in order to teach students how to cover sensitive issues such as race, religion and gender, the instructor must acknowledge students’
feelings and realize that talking about individual biases can rile up feelings of resentment, guilt and even hurt. In addition, instructors must be aware of how their own emotions can come into play, especially when students directly challenge them. As Earnest L. Perry Jr., associate professor and chair of journalism studies at the Missouri School of Journalism wrote, “When done right, [teaching cross-cultural reporting] is hard not only for the students, but also for the instructor” because an effective instructor uses every opportunity to challenge students’ belief that they are “culturally sensitive” (Perry, 2006, p.3). As a result, students could feel offended and react by directly attacking the instructor’s teaching or character, as was the case with Miller, who noted that his ratemyprofessor.com student ratings included hurtful comments that called him judgmental, smug and hypocritical. However, he claimed he has “a pretty thick skin”—something that kept him from taking such negative comments personally and pushed him to remain open to students’ criticism. He gave the example of when a student asked about why gender and sexual diversity was not being given as much attention in the class.

And one of the instructors said, “Well, because this is what’s important now. People are coming to terms with homosexuality and gay people and it’s not as—we’ve sort of solved that.” And this person just went berzerk, and said, “We haven’t solved it.” And so you had to be careful in the arguments, and it became easier to say you know, “That’s a very good point and we hope the course will develop that way, and what would that consist of” (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011)?

Developing a “thick skin” against negative comments and rejection may be important, but so too is encouraging students to talk honestly about their feelings in order to alleviate tension is crucial. In addition to having extensive knowledge of the subject, bringing in teaching assistants and journalists from diverse backgrounds to share “authentic” personal experiences and stories about how they are treated in the newsroom could expose students to new experiences.

However, being an instructor of colour and teaching about journalism and diversity has a different type of emotional baggage. As stated earlier, Ma was very aware of the rarity of her
racial status in the academy, and she had feared teaching a course on diversity because she anticipated students would react negatively. She had also indicated a slight fatigue, when she described the way she had to negotiate the power dynamics within the classroom and faculty. The frustration arising from a racial and gender double standard—white male professors tend to automatically command students’ respect while female professors of colour (especially younger ones) tend to have to work harder to earn it because students view them to be lacking experience and legitimacy (Harlow, 2003)—was not something her fellow professors in the journalism program or otherwise seemed to understand. Given Ma’s experience as an example, professors of colour teaching a course about race and the media may find that they have to manage both personal and professional emotions far more extensively than their white counterparts, and that they have to struggle harder to win a sense of control over their ability in the classroom (Harlow, 2003). Yet, like Miller said, having a diverse faculty is important. If journalism teachers are all white, then their experiences will probably be limited and this lack of insight can affect how well they teach this course. However, as Luk pointed out, having white instructors as the majority is inevitable because most schools are drawing teachers from a pool of journalists who are mostly white.

“Can a white person, can a white man teach this?” she mused. “Probably an intelligent white male can teach this, but you [have] got to be intelligent.”

An “intelligent,” teacher, then, must be observant and able to empathize and be sensitive to students’ feelings. More importantly, they must be competent enough to teach both similarities and differences within a multicultural society. Otherwise, they will fall into the usual stereotypes.
6.3 Readings Selection

In selecting readings and case studies for the course, all three instructors said material that would provoke discussions and pose questions is most ideal. Miller suggested that readings should cover a range of issues, such as racial stereotyping, limited sourcing, and the use of words and images that may misrepresent a particular minority group, while Ma said in more generalized terms that readings must bring students into a conversation about a particular topic in the course, and must help students articulate an opinion about a specific issue around journalism.

Luk insisted that readings must be current, journalistic articles as opposed to academic articles. For one, her students indicated they hated reading some of the academic journals that were assigned. For another, she believes “journalism is to write journalism.” Students should not be “fussing around with these academic things” when they need to “go out there and try to cover something involving blacks and find out how difficult it is,” she said.

Because these issues are very problematic in the newsroom today, it’s very much a live problem and so if you’re training journalists for the future, it would be really great if they would tackle these things. And that’s why it should never be covered academically for a journalism school. Sociologists can do that. We’re journalism, we need to do the hands-on, nitty gritty—get your hands dirty and see how you’re going to fail when you have to cover a racial issue (Luk, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

By reading or watching news clippings that contained problematic stereotypes, Luk said students can see when stories were not “done right,” and when an issue was complicated to cover. Consequently, they can brainstorm alternatives and discuss the possibility that there may not be a correct answer to how to cover particular issues.

If a diversity element was incorporated into the entire journalism program, Ma suggests that instructors all examine their reading lists and see where they can incorporate more diverse points of views and where they can add stories produced by journalists who are not traditionally included.
6.4 Assignments

Assignments in "Critical Issues" aimed to sharpen students' journalistic skills as well as to get students to check their own biases in terms of story framing and source selection. For example, Miller’s civic mapping assignment aimed to help students unlearn stereotypes and discover stories. Students would explore a chosen racial or religious minority community with which they are not familiar. Then they would present their findings to the class, such as the type of institutions and religions that are prevalent in that community, the authority figures, the prominent newspapers and television networks, and some of the issues with which the community is contending. Students were then required to submit a story that examines an issue that they discovered from the civic mapping assignment.

Miller said this assignment is helpful because it encouraged students to pretend they are not a journalist. Instead, he told them to look at the community through the lens of an urban geographer wanting to find out more about a community. This strategy can help move students away from a, “I better have a story in mind” mindset before they even approach a community.

Luk, on the other hand, said civic mapping was not helpful. She and her co-teacher also assigned it, but it differed slightly from Miller’s because students were required only to “pick a neighbourhood or a group and tell [the class] all about it,” and did not need to produce any stories afterwards.

Evidently, the discrepancy between the two civic mapping assignments, in terms of the assignment itself and the outcomes, illustrate a problem with passing on the course. There was little coordination and communication between instructors and, as Luk demonstrated when she inherited the course, a tendency to reinvent the course each time it was passed on to someone new.
Miller concluded as much, especially when his successors did not accept his offer of course materials.

They just said no, we’ve got our ideas for this class, and blah blah blah. Well to me that was short-sighted… when the resources are there and the people are willing to help you and provide all the material you want, you know, why say no? That’s just dumb (Miller, personal communication, February 21, 2011).

Luk agreed, saying a lot of effort is wasted on figuring out what this course means when a new instructor reinvents the wheel each time. Nonetheless, she said that if she were to teach the course again, she would abolish the civic mapping assignment. Instead, she would get students to write three to four stories about a particular minority group, and throughout the term she would meet with students to discuss story angles and problems they are having. The first story could be a profile, so that students could establish contacts and story ideas, but by the third or fourth story, the story should touch on an issue that involves tension.

I want something that’s uncomfortable. Something that’s uncomfortable to discuss, where it may not be any—where no one side is actually right, where the community is divided over it and quite vehement about it…I want them to do conflict stories because those are very difficult to do…I think for the students it’s more important for them to understand how touchy things are (Luk, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

Ma, who believed civic mapping does not help students to think critically about their craft, assigned a talk show production plan instead. The talk show topic had to be related to any one of the 12 topics that were covered in class. Students were required to speak to sources in a particular group, such as queer youth, and to ask questions of sources about a specific issue with which queer youth may be dealing, such as high suicide rates.

So it might mean calling up an editor, it might mean calling up a particular activist to discuss what the critical issue in journalism was at that time, which was, how is this topic covered and did this particular campaign have any impact (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011)?

Ma said this exercise allowed students to get the type of hands-on reporting experience that they may not get in other classes. Here, they can obtain a different sensitivity to approaching
communities with which they are not familiar, and understand they can’t be “calling things by
the wrong name because people will turn off.”

As well, through this assignment, students can learn the importance of using different
angles and sources that may be missing from the mainstream press.

I want them to be holistic about it and look at it at, you know, so what is the gay press
covering? Who is the gay press leaving out? Is the gay press leaving out, you know, a
particular segment of the population? Is the gay press leaving out people of colour (Ma,
personal communication, January 24, 2011)?

Luk agreed that this approach of considering different voices which can be incorporated
into any story and any form of storytelling is ideal for if a diversity element is to be incorporated
into all journalism courses.

That means if you’re teaching feature writing, or magazine-length journalism, you want
the story ideas to always consider that component, to always think about—it should be at
the back of your mind. It shouldn’t be overt in every story, but you should always ask
yourself the question, is there some way to be—make this more diverse, to reflect the
population that you’re reporting on, and reflect the people, the audience or the readers
who will be looking at that (Luk, personal communication, February 1, 2011)?

6.4.1 Evaluation

Miller and Luk realized early on that exams were not helpful. As this course can evoke
strong emotions in students, Miller said students might let these feelings overcome them and
purposely write provocative answers that would lead to a poor grade. Since at the graduate level,
small group seminars are the norm rather than large class lectures, exams would seem
unnecessary at the UBC J-School as well.

After several years of teaching “Critical Issues,” and evaluating students, Miller
developed a marking rubric for assignments and stories that may be helpful for UBC J-School
professors, called the diversity scale. At the lowest level, Miller said, is “no diversity coverage,”
where a student’s story is full of racial stereotyping, inaccurate information and limited sources.
At the next level is the “song and dance coverage,” where a story focuses on celebrating ethnic events and festivals. Then there is “unconscious diversity coverage,” where a story’s character just so happens to be from a particular racial or ethnic group, but the story’s topic is unrelated to that character’s racial identity. Finally, there is “conscious diversity coverage.” Through this scale, Miller said students could locate where they believe their journalistic work is at, and could then make improvements to achieve a higher level.

Not only does Miller’s diversity scale demonstrate an understanding of how individual bias can affect one’s reporting, it also offers a method to access and overcome that bias, and to produce more sophisticated and analytical coverage of racialized minorities. Therefore, not only can it be adapted by journalism schools, it can also be of use to media industries as well to assess their own work. Here, Ma gave an industry example of the difference between what Miller calls “song and dance coverage,” and “conscious diversity coverage.”

The Globe and Mail are like, “Let’s cover the different communities. Let’s do a story on Chinese New Year. We’ll do a story on Chinese New Year or the Moon Festival and you know, go into Chinatown and see the dragon and see moon cakes and dim sum.” That’s a nice story, nothing wrong with that, but there’s nothing interesting about that necessarily either. It doesn’t—it’s not analyzing anything, for me, about Chinese people in Canada. The more interesting story for me is, can you do a story that looks at the history of…you know, the fact that white women were arrested for marrying Chinese men in the fifties? Can you look at something that talks about the Chinese head tax and see, you know, where the Chinese community is on that issue today (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011)?

6.5 Teaching Strategies

To get students to understand the complexities behind different racial and minority groups, identify the problems behind stereotypical coverage, and produce stories that are more accurate is a daunting task. All three professors had to utilize various strategies to push students to confront their own biases, to engage them in discussions about the course material, and to produce in-depth and accurate stories.
Presenting case studies that did not meet the standards of fair and accurate coverage of racial minorities was a useful method to get class discussions going and to get students to think critically about the article. Miller and Luk found it helpful to first present a story that involves a particular racial minority, but to remove or change the racial identifiers or epithets. After students have discussed the story—often concluding with a, “What’s wrong with this?”—the professors would then insert the racial identifiers again. This exercise was meant to help students see that when racial minorities are incorporated into an otherwise acceptable story, the article can become discriminatory.

For example, Miller assigned a reading taken from Stormfront.org, a white supremacist website. The article, called “What is Racism?” argued that double standards are at work for white-Americans when it comes to racism:

> When a white man kills a black man and uses the word "nigger" while doing so, there is an enormous media uproar and the nation beats its collective breast; when members of the black Yahweh cult carry out ritual murders of random whites, the media are silent (see AR of March, 1991). College campuses forbid pejorative statements about non-whites as "racist," but ignore scurrilous attacks on whites (Jackson).

Miller took the “identifying stuff” off, and had students discuss the article.

> And when I thought the moment was right, I said, “Well, why did I find this at a white supremacist site?” And the whole class just—their mouths dropped opened, and so then we had to look at it again and said, “Well…oh. I see. Yeah” (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

Similarly, Luk said if she were to teach this course again, she would use the Maclean’s story, “Too Asian?” as teaching tool, where she would first present the original story, and then substitute all references to Asian-Canadians with Jewish people.

> Because I know there will be people in the class who would go, ‘What’s the problem? You’re being called smart.’ But it’s always bad to be singled out as, you know, the Jews under Nazi Germany found out, if you had to wear a yellow star, it’s not a good thing.
With Asians of course, they’re visibly different, we’re talking about visible minorities (Luk, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

Here it may be necessary to clarify once again that the term “visible minority” used to describe Asians in Canada is relative to where they are situated in Canada. For example, to call many Asian-Canadians “visible minorities” in cities such as Vancouver and Toronto is misleading because percentage-wise, the population of Asian-Canadians is rapidly rising in relation to what would be considered the white majority in other parts of the nation. The term also implies inferiority. As a result, it may be necessary for instructors to encourage students to think critically about common sense but problematic language such as “visible minority”, “person of colour”, “racial minority”, and “person with disability.” Also, students should also be encouraged to think about when and when not to use racial identifiers in a story. When applied to certain people out of context or relevancy, these identifiers further marginalize them as being different from or inferior to the mainstream. Certainly, instructors and students are not to be expected to come up with concrete alternatives. Nonetheless, discussing this issue could push students to think more carefully about how they can use language that is more representative when they produce stories.

6.5.2 Guest Speakers

Miller and Luk also found that bringing in working journalists who can speak passionately and articulate clearly about their work was another method to engage students in discussion and to ask questions. Guest speakers often have first-hand experiences that the instructors do not

For example, Luk said students seemed most engaged when, during the week that she was teaching about covering people with disabilities, she brought in a CBC producer who uses a wheelchair. Since the producer had quite a personality—“She came in and she was spitting mad
because she couldn’t even get into the building without going all around because there’s no wheelchair access,“ said Luk—she was able to captivate the students, especially one who also used a wheelchair. The producer showed story clips about a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan who had lost one of his legs in a blast. She then talked about how he was immediately labeled by the media as a hero, but in her opinion, a better story would be to ask deeper questions about any kind of trauma this soldier might be suffering from, or why he decided to stay in Afghanistan still.

Anyway, she launched this discussion and I think because I had a real-life example, a person coming in who was a journalist and because she brought a clip that showed how one-dimensional this was—and in fact, in the final exam most of the kids wrote about this. You know, I gave them a choice of topics, so I think that one they understood, they got it, so it was really good (Luk, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

6.5.3 Scoping for Stories: Getting Past Resistance and Gaining Trust

Journalists often experience challenges getting a story when they approach people who are suspicious of the media. This suspicion may be even more pronounced amongst racial or religious minorities who are wary of media that misrepresents them, as El-Gawley demonstrated with her experience interviewing Lebanese-Australians who are hostile to Australian media for frequently depicting them as criminals (2009). For Luk, meeting resistance from sources is a lesson in and of itself.

The best lesson for them would be if people didn’t welcome them with open arms and they had to find out how to gain trust, how to persuade people to talk to them. That would be ideal, actually. I don’t—I want them to find how difficult it is to get people to talk (Luk, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

To get past this difficulty, Miller and Luk offered their students pointers on how to gain trust from racial minority communities.

Miller said spending time with people in the community can help alleviate tension. He said that in the late 90s, one of the toughest communities to penetrate in Toronto was the Korean
community. When he asked some of his students, “Well, where’s it located? What’s there?”, the group answered, “Well, there are a lot of karaoke bars.” Therefore, Miller said, “Well that’s a good place to go hang out. Go have a beer and talk to people.” As a result, students came back with a story: it turns out singing karaoke is a popular way for many young Korean-Canadians who have pulled away from their heritage and cannot speak Korean to get back in touch with their native language.

Spending time in a community in a “non-controversial way” is what Luk calls the “soft approach.” However, the “hard approach” is also necessary, particularly when approaching people in authority.

So door-stopping them, like, waiting and ambushing them when they come out of their office or something, or waiting outside their house,” she explained. “So there’s many different ways to find out—of course if somebody won’t talk to you, you might have to go around them and talk to somebody who works with them. Or another approach should be to talk to the other side and say, “Look, I’ve got the other side, if you want to give me your side, this is your last chance” (Luk, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

6.5.4 Establishing Contacts

Once students have gotten past the initial resistance from the community they are reporting on, they must then establish contacts so they can get information for their story assignments. Luk said one of the easiest ways to do so is to assign students a profile story. Students will have to identify a person from the community they are reporting on—whether it is a particular ethnic group, or an association for people with mental disabilities, or an activist group—and write a profile story. During that interview, students should find out what other participants from the community they should speak to, and from there, tease out some story ideas.

Because anybody—everybody has a story, but they’ve got to be sort of participating in some perceived group. You can’t pick an Iranian-Canadian who has nothing to do with Iranian-Canadians…I think after you’ve done the profile, you would have met maybe
three or four or five people. One of them is going to be able to direct you to something that’s going on (Luk, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

Here, Luk made an important point about self-racialization and essentialization. It is not enough to identify a perceived racial group and then assume that such a group is homogenous and all members share the same characteristics, values and interests. When reporting on a particular community, journalists must take into consideration context and how people identify themselves. As Luk pointed out, an Iranian-Canadian could be labeled as such due to his race, appearance or citizenship—he may “look” like an Iranian, or be an Iranian by birth who has Canadian citizenship, or a person whose parents are an Iranian and a Canadian, and so on—but may not identify himself as such. In fact, all three instructors agreed that journalists must be careful not to make generalized constructions of their sources’ identities just to fit them into a story.

You can’t really say anything when you say, “Well, the black community thinks that...Well, the black community is very diverse. Lots of communities are very diverse, and I said, “Well, it’s like the white community. Who speaks for the white community? You know, it’s very diverse.” So let’s go out of the notion that we’re going to do this group today or this week, and another group next week. News doesn’t work like that (Miller, personal communication, January 21, 2011).

Likewise, Luk said that one of the valued skills of reporting is understanding the complexity of an issue, and translating it into simple terms for the reader without oversimplifying or distorting the truth. Therefore, part of the instructor’s lecture must include lessons about stereotyping and about assuming a monolithic community. In addition, both she and Ma said that lessons must be given on intersectionality of identities, and how slotting sources in a particular identity can become problematic. Here, Luk gave the example of reporting on people with mental illnesses, and argued that stories on mental illnesses in the mainstream press tends to focus only on either homeless people, or on middle-class, white people whose first
language is English and who have been in Canada for several generations.

And it’s just a presumption that it doesn’t cross ethnic groups, it doesn’t cross class. We don’t have mental illness [stories] about Muslims, for instance, and there are. We don’t have mental illness stories about Chinese, or gay people, because that’s really touchy right (Luk, personal communication, February 1, 2011)?

Therefore, Luk suggested that a good teaching strategy is to have students pick a perceived group in the community—whether it’s an ethnic group, or a group of transgendered people or people who are HIV-positive—and from there, scout out a possible story about someone who is suffering from a mental illness.

Ma also stressed to her students the importance of maintaining an updated source list. She encouraged students to write down the name and phone numbers of everyone they speak to in order to get a variety of sources. That way, they are not constantly relying on the same “expert” for their stories. Going to that same expert for a quote is one of the pitfalls that journalists often fall into, and is a reason why stories can turn out one-sided.

You’re on a deadline so [you’re] going to call that same older professor at the School of…you know, Health, because he can always answer the questions about whatever your story is about…Aboriginals in Winnipeg, or you know, high suicide rates (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011).

But by talking to different experts who are knowledgeable about the same issue, students can bring fresh perspectives to an old, tired story.

The other thing is, well, let’s look at the story from a different angle instead of constantly looking at the question of why, hmm…let’s see, there’s a high suicide rate amongst Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg. Maybe the question could be, instead, today or this week is, what are youth doing in a positive way? So it’s about also flipping that very paradigm (Ma, personal communication, January 24, 2011).
7 Conclusion

Through my research, I discovered that teaching journalism students to report on issues involving racial diversity in a fair and accurate way is not simply about setting up a course and teaching students about best practices. Instead, as Ryerson instructors John Miller, Joy Luk and Kali Ma have proven, instructors have to deal with a multitude of issues that have less to do with the mechanics of giving lectures, assigning readings and marking assignments, and more to do with managing complex emotions that arise from student opposition and faculty politics. First, the instructor must always be conscious that getting students to discuss touchy subjects such as race and/or gender forces students to confront their own unconscious biases. This in turn can cause them to resent the course and its instructors. Therefore, the instructor must be a good course facilitator in the sense that he or she can establish a safe haven for students to speak honestly about their opinions and to alleviate tension when it builds up. On the other hand, allowing students to speak openly can induce them to direct hostile and wounding comments at the professor. Thus, teaching this course can mean instructors have to deal with a fair bit of hurt and frustration, particularly when the topic is something they are very passionate about or can relate to. Thus, they must be prepared to manage those emotions. Finally, advocates for a separate course on diversity coverage or for the inclusion of a diversity element into the entire journalism curriculum must be prepared for a possible lack of appreciation on faculty’s part for diversity’s relevance to journalism education. This could mean that advocates may have to consider how fighting for such a course can affect their employment or relationship with other faculty members. As a result, whether the UBC Graduate School of Journalism chooses to establish a separate course focused on covering diversity or to further incorporate a diversity element into all their reporting classes, the faculty must take these factors into consideration.
Bibliography


Findlay, Stephanie & Kohler, Nicholas. (2010, November 10). ‘Too Asian’? A term used in the U.S. to talk about racial imbalance at Ivy League schools is now being whispered on Canadian campuses. *Maclean’s.* Retrieved from http://www2.macleans.ca/


Miller, J. (1994, How Canada's daily newspapers shut out minorities. Media Magazine,


Racial Diversity in the Media Affects Social Justice and Policy, St. John's University School of Law, Queens, New York.

Small, P., & Powell, B. (2010, May 25). Back to prosecutor: Why charges against Michael Bryant were dropped. Toronto Star,


Tyler, T. (2011, January 30). Back to equal but at times 'subhuman': How Ontario's justice system has treated blacks. Toronto Star,


Critical Issues in Journalism

JRN 301

Some of the biggest issues in the news today – from the war on terror, to the debate over immigration, to the coverage of crime and policing, to the conflict in the Middle East – draw journalists into questions about race, religion and ethnicity. To get the story, you may have to unlearn stereotypes, get people to trust you who are suspicious of the media or even hostile, and ask awkward questions about religious, cultural and historical traditions.

Toronto is one of the world’s most cosmopolitan cities. Fifty-two percent of its residents are foreign born, and most of them are non-white. So no matter who you are, one out of every two interviews you do may be with someone of a different colour, culture or religion. The people who read, watch or listen to your work will reflect the same diversity.

This puts a special responsibility on journalists. Why? Because coverage that springs from ignorance, or is inhibited by fear of the unfamiliar, falls short of the core values of fairness, clarity, context and accuracy. In this course, you will learn the tools to do it right.

Format: Undergraduate students in all streams of third year will meet each week for a two-hour general presentation, lecture or group discussion. This large group will be divided into four smaller one-hour seminar groups, each with its own instructor, to discuss the presentation or do practical exercises stemming from it.

Goals: We will:

- Identify nine ideas for strengthening journalism.
- Use them as tools to address some blind spots journalism has on matters of race and religion.
- Understand why and how some groups are often ignored or stereotyped by the
- mainstream media.
- Develop a strategy to fairly and accurately cover these groups and individuals.
- Find fresh story ideas — about achievement as well as conflict — within these communities.
- Learn how to frame stories properly to add depth and context.
- Pitch diversity stories to the professional media.

**Text:** Students must buy the yellow workbook that contains readings for class and seminars. It’s sold in the bookstore –“Critical Issues in Journalism: Workbook, readings and tips for JRN 301.”

**What is diversity?** Diversity means difference, and this can include differences of language, cultural background, race, gender, sexuality, age, socioeconomic status, religion and physical ability. In this course, we will focus on cross-cultural reporting, and the skills required to tell interesting and accurate stories through the lens of race and religion. You will be expected to cover stories in communities where you are a visible minority.

**Ethics:** Cross-cultural reporting is really about practicing good journalism. Since a journalist is only as valuable as his or her integrity, we expect that each piece of work you submit is purely your own; that all sources of information and quotations are scrupulously attributed; and that your reporting is actual and current. Penalties for fabrication or plagiarism range from failure in the assignment to failure in the course.

**Ground rules:** In this course, we talk about issues that are sometimes difficult to talk about. This is a safe place. We expect you to show respect to your fellow students, to instructors and to guest speakers. But we encourage you to express your thoughts openly. The course will accomplish little if it does not cause you to think more deeply about some of these issues, and challenge some of your assumptions about the world and other people.

**Responsibility:** You are expected to show up on time for every class. Do not schedule interviews or work for this or other classes during the period you should be here. You must also have a Ryerson e-mail account so instructors can communicate with everyone.

**Deadlines:** Your work is due on time — at the beginning of your seminar period, on the week noted. One copy of each assignment must be handed to your instructor in person, or sent by e-mail at the start of class. Late assignments will carry penalties of 20 per cent per day. Missed assignments will be considered grounds for failure. A request for an extended deadline will only be given on medical or compassionate grounds, and only if the instructor is informed before the original due date.

**Assignments:**
(See detailed assignment instructions below)

**30% Civic “mapping” assignment (team project)** — You will create a road map for how a particular racial or religious minority community in Toronto works, how journalists can tap into the different layers, and what stories are building beneath the surface. **Due on Feb. 7.**

**40% Feature story** — 1,500-word feature story using multiple sources examining an issue that is engaging a diverse community at the moment. This should stem from an idea you uncovered in the first assignment. **Due**
on March 21.
20% Content analysis report. Monitor five consecutive newscasts, magazines or newspapers for how they cover diversity. Due on April 11.
10% Class participation. Your group will present the readings once this semester (assigned at second class). There will be five spot-checks for attendance, and students will receive credit for participation in discussions.

Week by week class schedule:

Week One, Jan. 10. Intro to the course.
Lecture: Explain course and student roles with workbook, and how diversity relates to core values of journalism. Outline nine ideas for strengthening journalism.
Seminar: Personal stories: What experience have you had with culture?

Lecture: The problems today’s media have covering race and religion. Show KRON video on impact of TV news on race relations. Guests talk about how today’s newsrooms recognize the problem and are trying to do something about it.
Seminar: Civic mapping, and how to do it. Hand out list of communities.
Readings: Do the Race IAT; Civic mapping.

Week Three, Jan. 24. Stereotypes and how they affect journalism.
Lecture: How and why we all carry around stereotypes. Examples of stereotypes. Fault lines. Explain the various levels of coverage of diversity. Show TV clip on sourcing.
Seminar: Discuss reading on white privilege.
Readings: Journalism diversity scale; Michael Moore article.

Week Four, Jan. 31. Who am I to criticize?
Lecture: What’s a white critic to do when you’re reviewing a production celebrating black culture, and you don’t like it?
Seminar: Appropriating voice: Was Ouzounian right?
Reading: Ouzounian’s review of the production.

Week Five, Feb. 7. Racial profiling — Does it exist?
Lecture. Case study: How was Ipperwash covered? Guest from aboriginal community discussing how it feels to be on the receiving end.
Seminar: Is racial profiling justified? Discuss questions posed by readings.
Readings: Excerpts from Ontario Human Rights Commission report on racial profiling; Ric Dolphin column and article on Maurice Switzer.

Week Six, Feb. 14. Story consultations. No classes or seminars. Students sign up for consultation on final feature project. All will bring a written story proposal with interview plans.

Week Seven, Feb. 21. Reading Week. No classes.

Week Eight, Feb. 28. Covering difference.
Lecture: What minefields are there when you try to report on political differences within an ethnic community? What greater minefields exist when you don’t.
Seminar: How media tend to dismiss issues of racial difference.
Readings: Henry and Tator’s Discourses of Racism.
Week Nine, March 7. Deciphering hidden codes in journalism

**Lecture:** Just Desserts case study: What happened when the wrong co-ordinates got punched into the media’s sophisticated guidance system. With reference to the 2005 slaying of Jane Creba. **Seminar:** Discussion of Diane Francis column in workbook. Opinion vs. reality.

**Readings:** “Out of Touch” chapter from *Yesterday’s News.* Diane Francis column and myths about immigrants.


**Lecture:** How do you cover Black crime when you’re trying to be colour blind? When do you take the blinders off and fairly and accurately cover communities at risk?

**Seminar:** When to use racial identifiers in stories.

**Reading:** Crime coverage.

Week Eleven, March 21. Reporting conflict in the Muslim community.

**Lecture:** Two guests discuss the fallout from a proposal to establish sharia arbitrations in Ontario. How the issue split the Muslim community, and did the media make it worse.

**Seminar:** Break into groups to discuss guidelines for making contacts, asking questions, using terminology and framing stories.

**Readings:** Tips on diversity reporting from back of workbook.

Week Twelve, March 28. The foreign correspondent model of reporting.

**Lecture:** Guest from media reflects on how techniques of a foreign correspondent can be brought home to cover diverse communities.

**Seminar:** Discuss reading that is critical of political correctness.

**Reading:** “‘What is Racism?’” From Stormfront.org.

Week Thirteen, April 4. On the front lines of the war on terror. Keeping your journalism straight.

**Lecture:** Michele Shephard of the Toronto Star talks about her reporting visit to Guantanamo Bay, and the troublesome questions of covering the Khadr family.

**Seminar:** Pitch training. Students present final features and decide which ones will be presented at next week’s Pitch Session. How to get your idea across in two sentences.

Week Fourteen, April 11. Pitch Day.

**Lecture:** Panel of media editors hears students pitching their stories.

**Seminar:** Feedback on major feature.

**Detailed assignment instructions:**

Your seminar leader is your editor and will be evaluating your work. All assignments should be handed in to that person, at the beginning of seminar on the date indicated. They will be evaluated according to the Marking Criteria explained below. The final feature will also be evaluated according to the Journalism Diversity Scale in the course workbook (A is “‘mainstreaming,’” B is “‘diversity by design,’” C is “‘diversity by accident,’” D is “‘token coverage’”). Gross errors of fact, including misspelling a proper name, will be grounds for failure on any assignment.
TEAM PROJECT — Civic mapping (30%)

Due on Feb. 7.
Form yourselves into groups of four to select a community that no one in your group has ties to. You may choose a racial or religious minority that does not appear on the list handed out on Jan. 17, but it must be approved by your instructor. Follow the outline and instructions for Civic Mapping in your workbook. Your report should be written in point form under the following headings:
(a) Overview of community (b) How things get dealt with (c) The go-to places (d) The go-to sources (e) History (f) Current issues (g) Sensitivities

Major feature project (40%)
You will pitch your major feature story idea at a meeting with your instructor on Feb. 14. You need a written outline for that meeting based on your research, preliminary interviews/visits/observations. The outline should be divided into the following sections:
(a) The community (b) What’s the story and why is it new; (c) Why the story is interesting/relevant/important; (d) How you know the story is there (discuss your preliminary research, who you spoke to, what you experienced (e) Who you plan to interview and why
The focus of the feature should be on the conflicts/achievements/experiences that minorities are facing in Toronto in the year 2004. Particular attention should be paid to how these groups and individuals are being treated by the major institutions of our society. You may also choose to focus on the pressures within those communities (social, generational, economic, political, cultural, etc.)
Each 1,000-word story should contain several sources, be written in a featurish style (show-don’t-tell, strong theme paragraph, etc.) and explore new ground.
NOTE: When you identify yourself to sources, say you’re a Ryerson journalism student working on a classroom project that you hope will be published.
All sources for your story should be identified fully with their phone number.
Broadcast students have the option of submitting a script for a 5-minute video or audio documentary.
EXAMPLES OF ISSUES: Immigration, discrimination, gender, neighbourhoods, business, social services, generational conflict, conflict with another group, urban demographics, religion, education, policing and crime, media portrayal, real estate, political involvement, disability, transportation, public health, sexuality, recognition and achievement, lifestyle/culture, recognition of foreign professional credentials, etc.

Content analysis (20%)
Due on April 11.
You will monitor five consecutive issues of a newspaper, television newscast or copies of a magazine to assess how they are depicting visible minorities. Content analyses will be explained in class. You should include both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content.
Your 800-word report should include comment on your findings from a member of that news
organization. You should pay particular attention to the following areas, and give examples where appropriate:
(a) How often visible minorities appear as reporters, commentators and sources; (b) What minority issues are discussed, and how; (c) Your conclusions about how effective this media outlet is in dealing with visible minorities.

Marking criteria
Your assignments will be marked by your seminar instructor, who subscribes to the following general guidelines. For each assignment, you will be given a numerical mark (out of 10, 15 or 40, depending on the weight of the assignment). These will be added up and translated into letter grades, using the following standards:

A
Outstanding work, showing a thorough understanding of the concepts introduced in class and exhibiting critical and original thought. A publishable piece of work. You have tried to break new ground. Your research allows you to give logical and convincing support for your conclusions. You have found excellent sources and used concrete examples. You write with style and clarity.

B
Very good work, showing a good understanding of the concepts involved. Conclusions are clearly stated, although conventional. There is good support for your conclusions, although you have not addressed some minor areas of the question or assignment. If it’s a reporting assignment, it may need more sources or questions answered but are basically a sound story.

C
Satisfactory work, showing a good attempt to understand the concepts involved. Conclusions may be clearly stated but show gaps in logic or research. Writing is fuzzy, to the point that it blunts some of your findings. Several aspects of the questions have not been addressed. Sources are mainly the usual suspects; you haven’t dug for new ones. Work cannot be published until more research is done.

D
Passable work, but with a poor attempt to understand and address the key concepts. Not all conclusions are supported by logic or research and sometimes you fail to include key elements of the question. Writing is sloppy. Key sources have not been interviewed.

F
Unacceptable work because you fail to deal with the key concepts and are unclear about your conclusions. You have done little or no research and only skim the surface of the issue.

Your points are poorly argued. The sources are not appropriate, or not particularly well
interviewed. Failure marks can range from zero to 49 per cent. In the case of very late or missing assignments, the mark will be zero.
Appendix B: Critical Issues Syllabus Winter 2010

Ryerson University

School of Journalism

Faculty of Communication and Design

JRN 400: Critical Issues in Journalism

Winter 2010

Lecture: 1-2 p.m. Thursdays
Room: KHE121

Seminars: 2-4 p.m.
Section: 012
Room: KHE 220

Section: 021
Room: KHE 222

Introduction

This is a time of unparalleled opportunity and challenge in journalism. Dramatic social, technological, political and economic changes are transforming the world and the way we report on it.

Toronto is one of the world’s most cosmopolitan cities. Fifty-two percent of its residents are foreign-born, and most of these are nonwhite. So no matter who we are, half of the interviews we do as journalists in Toronto are likely to be with someone of a different colour, culture or religion. Local viewers, listeners and readers reflect this same diversity. Regional and national audiences are also diverse, albeit in different ways.

Therefore, the practice of journalism today requires an understanding of the diversity on display in our societies, an awareness of the pitfalls inherent in reporting on unfamiliar communities, and a concern for those that are invisible or whose stories aren’t being told. We need to be aware of diversity issues in our own ranks, and of what may be lost when newsrooms and their leaders do not reflect a broad range of
experience. We also need to recognize blindspots in specific genres or beats such as war, the arts, or health.

Today’s journalists are required to assume new and difficult challenges. The unstoppable reach of the Internet – from online news aggregates to the rise of citizen journalism – has redrawn the traditional lines between professional and amateur journalism and affected major revenues sources for the former. We must be aware of how our own coverage, because of unfamiliarity, ignorance, fear, or over-reliance on questionable sources, may fall short of our core journalistic values of fairness, clarity, context and accuracy. JRN 400 aims to sharpen your critical faculties through topics explored in three units:

1- **Covering Diversity**: gender, race, religion, mental illness and physical disabilities.
2- **Beats/Genres**: War, Crime, Health/Science, sports
3- **Other Issues**: Citizen journalism, the effects of media concentration, convergence and corporate influence.
Format

All students meet on Thursdays from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. in KHE 121 for a lecture, which may include guest speakers and video presentations. Immediately following, two separate seminar groups will meet for two hours, 2 to 4 p.m., in rooms nearby to discuss the assigned readings and continue the discussion.

Communication

There’s no assigned textbook. All readings (journal articles, as well as newspaper and magazine features) will be posted on Blackboard on a weekly basis in PDF or Word documents, or as web links. The site will serve as a notice board, so please check regularly for updates. Please note that some articles that cannot be read online may be distributed in hard copy during class time. Urgent notifications may reach you via your Ryerson e-mail account, so make sure you monitor it daily. Cell phones should be turned off, or placed on silent or vibrate during classes. Laptops are to be used for JRN 400 purposes only.

Responsibilities

You are expected to show up on time for all classes. Do not schedule interviews or work for this course (or other courses) during the lecture and seminar times: Thursdays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. You must have a Ryerson email account. We will not respond to any student emails from other accounts. You must complete all assignments in order to pass the course.

JRN 400, in part at least, deals with issues around gender, race, religion and sexuality as it relates to journalism. We expect all discussions to be conducted in an atmosphere of respect to everyone in the room. There’s zero tolerance for derogatory or offensive language.

We expect that any work you submit is entirely your own, and that you attribute all quotations and give sources for information. Penalties for fabrication, plagiarism or other forms of cheating will range from failing an assignment to failing the course and will include a disciplinary notice being placed on your academic record.

Also, note the following:

You are required to adhere to Ryerson University’s Code of Academic Conduct, which covers plagiarism, and other transgressions. It is at: http://www.ryerson.ca senate/policies/pol60.pdf
You are also required to adhere to the School of Journalism's Rules of Conduct, which contain greater detail about truth-telling issues specific to the practice of journalism. These are in the student handbook at: http://www.ryerson.ca/journalism/student_handbook/rules_of_the_game/index.html#Rules%20of%20Conduct...

The student handbook also contains information on appeals and course management. The full university policies on these subjects, which set out in detail the responsibilities of academic units, instructors and students, can be found at: http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/ (Policies 134 and 145).

**Assignments**

If an assignment is late, 10 percentage points will be deducted from the grade for each full 24-hour period it is overdue. Requests for extensions will be considered only on medical or compassionate grounds, and only if your instructor receives the request before the due date.

Here’s the breakdown of your marks for this course:

- Mid-term Exam (30%). Feb. 11.
- Civic Mapping (30%). Due at the beginning of Feb. 25 lecture.
- Final Exam (40%). On April 8, at the end of the last seminar, you will be given a take-home exam with questions drawn from the topics covered in the course. The completed exam is due as a hard copy in your instructor’s mailbox on April 23.

Marking criteria can be found toward the end of this outline
Class Schedule

**Week 1, Jan. 7 - Introduction to the course**
Both lecture and seminars will introduce some of the recurrent themes and ideas you’ll encounter in this course. Seminar will deal more specifically with how to begin the civic mapping assignment.

**Week 2, Jan 14 - Diversity: Covering Gender**
A look at representation of women in the news media and how women's roles and experiences in newsrooms inform their coverage. Has the glass ceiling finally been shattered or is diversity in newsrooms just an illusion?

**Week 3, Jan. 21 – Diversity: Covering Religion**
In the last decade, Islam, more than any other religion, has increasingly and almost exclusively been identified with terrorism in the Western mainstream news media – often challenging Western notions of tolerance, plurality and accommodation. What is the role and responsibility of the news media regarding the depiction of Islamic culture and Islam as a religion? What is the responsibility of journalists in expanding the range of Muslim voices in areas affecting Muslim populations and stereotypes about Muslims? Have journalists acted as responsible guides or fear mongers?

**Week 4, Jan 28- Diversity: Covering Race**
An overview of topics, such as, First Nations, racial profiling, categories such as “visible minority” and “person of colour,” and what they mean to journalism and newsrooms.

**Week 5, Feb. 4 – Diversity: Covering mental illness and physical disabilities**
From coverage of homelessness to sports, journalists are often devoid of accurate and sensitive vocabulary and lack understanding to deal with mental and physical ailments. This class will explore some of the challenges journalists face covering these areas.

**Week 6, Feb 11 – Beats: Sports (MID-TERM EXAM on readings and class discussions)**

**READING WEEK: Feb 18: No lecture or seminar.**
Week 7, Feb. 25 - Beats: War – (CIVIC MAPPING ASSIGNMENT DUE)

War reportage makes for some of the most dangerous but also exciting work for many journalists. But how accurate is the picture journalists portray from conflict zones when they are filing stories while embedded with troops and when dealing with military censorship? This class will also explore whether journalists working with the demands of 24/7 news cycles have the tools to cover war fairly.

Week 8, March 4 - Beats: Celebrities -

One of the big criticisms of Barack Obama during the 2008 election was that he was a celebrity – triggering a YouTube defence from famous-for-being-famous Paris Hilton. How do we avoid being driven to distraction by the boldfaced names?

Week 9, March 11 – Beats: Health/Science -

Health journalism may arguably be one of the most important forms of public service. But how well do journalists understand the studies they report on? How honest are the sources they draw from? And, how do you report risk without sensationalized scare mongering and without spreading misleading information?

Week 10, March 18 – Beats: Fluff - Jan

So your editor has assigned you to get a bikini wax or wear a burqa for a day or write about Martha Stewart’s new line of bed sheets. How to commit journalism while writing about fluff? We’ll teach you how to take a stupid story to the next level by never giving up, by always doing your best.

OTHER CRITICAL AREAS:

Week 11, March 25 – Concentration of ownership, Convergence and corporate influence on news.

What are the implications for news coverage when media chains dominate a region? Just how much of a problem is media concentration and convergence? Also, we’ll examine how corporate interests influence news stories.

Week 12, April 1 – Citizen journalism - Who is a journalist?

The impact of Blogs, the Internet, YouTube, twitter, and other video/photo uploading, upcoming technology on the creation and dissemination of news. Will professional journalists become irrelevant as more and more bloggers and videographers take the
news into their own hands? We will examine the merits and shortfalls of citizen journalism. Is comment the same as reporting? Does opinion equal analysis? Is more journalism better for journalists?

**Week 13, April 8 – The next wave of critical issues for the news media**

Critical issues look-ahead with an industry-wide panel discussion.

(May change to analyze recent case study)

**Marking criteria**

Here is Ryerson University’s numerical-to-letter-grade conversion table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Percentage range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>85-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>60-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>57-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>53-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>50-52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-class tests and take-home exams will be graded according to the following criteria:

**A (80-100)** – Outstanding work, showing a thorough understanding of the concepts introduced in class and exhibiting critical and original thought. You have tried to break new ground. Drawing on solid research, you give logical and convincing support for your conclusions. Your work is written clearly and cogently, is sourced well and provides concrete examples.

**B (70-79)** – Very good work, showing a good understanding of the concepts involved. Conclusions are clearly stated, albeit conventional. You offer good support for your conclusions, though you may not have addressed some minor areas of the question or assignment. It may need more sources or background information, but it is basically sound.
C (60-69) – Satisfactory work, showing a good attempt to understand the concepts involved. Conclusions may be clearly stated but show gaps in logic or research. Writing may be unclear. Several aspects of the question have not been addressed. Sources are predictable and don’t reflect spadework to turn up new ones. The work requires additional research.

D (50-59) – Passable work, but with insufficient success at understanding and addressing key concepts. Not all conclusions are supported by logic or research, and you have failed to include key elements of the question. Writing is sloppy. Key sources may not have been interviewed.

F (0-50) – Unacceptable. The work has failed to understand and address key concepts. Conclusions are unclear. Your work shows little or no research. Points are poorly argued. Sourcing is inadequate or not appropriate. Failure marks can range from zero to 49 per cent.

Miscellaneous

Accommodation: Ryerson and the School of Journalism are committed to providing as much access and accommodation as possible for students with disabilities or other special needs. Please tell us about any such requirements as soon as you can. Please also let us know if accommodations prove unsatisfactory or new requirements arise during the term. If necessary you may refer to Ryerson’s Policy on Academic Consideration and Appeals, available at [http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/policies.html](http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/policies.html).

Research: As third-year students, you are expected to be familiar with basic computing systems, including word processing, remote communication and networking, e-mail and Internet research practices. You are also expected to be familiar with Ryerson’s Library, particularly the use of its electronic data bases as research tools. Familiarity with Factiva is particularly recommended. This database archives more than 5,000 news and scholarly publications, including most major English-language daily newspapers, newsmagazines, television and radio programs in transcript, magazines and academic journals. It is considered indispensable by many journalists on the job and is invaluable for background on current issues.
Appendix C: Critical Issues Syllabus Fall 2010

**JRN 400: Critical Issues in Journalism  Fall 2010 / Wednesday 2-5pm**

-----------------------------------

1. **Introduction**

The post 9/11 decade marks a time of unparalleled opportunity and challenge in journalism. Dramatic social, technological, political and economic changes are transforming the world and the way we report on it. This course will explore controversial and critical journalistic issues and aims to sensitize students to the global geo-political context that underlies the conventions and practices of contemporary journalism. New challenges include digital journalism redrawing the traditional lines between professional and amateur journalism - with tools like twitter, online news aggregates, and YouTube affecting major revenues sources and the “authority” of news makers. All of this is taking place against fault lines in the traditional role of news media as a watchdog of democracy and a champion of its citizenry’s right to know – not to mention some gutsy and perplexing advances by the public relations machine into editorial content. Is journalism in danger of losing its place at the heart of democratic society? Are the only journalists telling the truth actually comedians? What purpose does tabloid journalism serve? How has the ubiquity of “The image” change the way we see the world? By placing journalism in a wider intellectual and historical context, this course seeks to produce a large sense of journalism as a vocation as it relates to politics and civic life. Some topics looked at include: *journalism’s role in a democracy *reporting conflict, terrorism and war *the future of investigative journalism *race and ideology *the image *global civil society With that in mind, Critical Issues in Journalism will be divided into four units, each encompassing several critical issues:

1. **Democracy**: press freedoms, recent violations of press freedoms
2. **Spin and Media Ownership**: fake editorials, gatekeepers
3. **Diversity**: newsroom debates and critiques of media on gender, race, religion and sexuality

4. **Digital Challenges**: citizen journalism, twitter, social networking

2. **Week-by-week class schedule**

3.
**Week 1, Sept. 7: Journalism Realities - Due: course registration, brainstorm session (lecture), 1 test question and answer (seminar)**  
**Lecture:** Introduction to the course (overview of topics through case studies) and questions about syllabus. Brainstorming of journalism realities: What is journalism? What are journalists? What have they been and what are they becoming? What is the relation between journalism and democracy? Between journalism and public life? What means have been used to control journalism and journalists? Journalism has had a long and complicated history with democracy. The recent past – post-9/11 – has challenged our conceptions of freedom and rights. The future, particularly with a grinding recession underway, looks uncertain, turbulent and more ideologically charged.  
**Case Study:** The Runaway General  
**Seminar:** Discussion of lecture and readings. Form initial work and discussion groups.  

**Week 2, Sept. 15: Killing Journalists - Due: Group assignments, one minute essay (in class)**  
**Lecture:** What are the implication when journalists must work and live within a culture of impunity? How can the new tools of journalism work to help reporters working within cultures of impunity? Case Studies: You Tube (L.A., Iran), The Philippines  
**Seminar:** Covering the Story - Case study, Iraq Gaza and the New York Times, multiple perspectives  
**Read for Class 2:** CBC The Hour; "In which countries are journalists likely
to be killed?" Interview with Terry Gould, author of Murder Without Borders. [http://www.cbc.ca/video/#/Shows/The_Hour/Guests/ID=12372668](http://www.cbc.ca/video/#/Shows/The_Hour/Guests/ID=12372668)


**Week 3, Sept. 21: Covering War**

**Lecture:** This case examines foreign coverage of a wartime episode when reporters have to test their powers of observation and verification. It raises the issues of one-sided information, the role of an editor and a news organization’s relationship with government. Case studies: Iraq, Rwanda

**Seminar:** Case Study, Iraq

**Readings for Class 3:**
Sites, Kevin. "This is how I go." Fall 2010  [http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102470/This-Is-How-I-Go.aspx](http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102470/This-Is-How-I-Go.aspx)

*Burma VJ (90 minute DVD)* rent it from Blockbuster, Rogers, Queen Video, etc.

**Week 4, Sept. 28: Gatekeeping, Spin, Fake Editorials** Due:  **Lecture:** At its most basic level, as one scholar recently summed it up, these theories mainly referred to gatekeeping as “a selection process” and “offered communication scholars a framework for analyzing, evaluating and comprehending how communication or news selection occurred and why some items were selected while others were rejected.”

**Seminar:** Work on Talk Show Proposal

**Readings for class 4:**

Week 5, Oct. 6: Media Ownership  Due:

Lecture: From the ubiquitous-seeming press release to the grand stunt and the faux YouTube “amateur” video, tactics by public relations experts are as much a part of the journalist’s working environment as picking up the phone. Are journalists wiser to their tricks now or just playing along? How much of a problem is media concentration – and what, if anything, can be done about it? A review of Canada and elsewhere. What are the implications for news coverage when media chains dominate a region.

Seminar:


Week 6, Oct. 13: What do Pictures Want

Due: Feature Pitches and Talk Show Proposals


Week 7, Oct. 20: Is it Ground Zero or Lower Manhattan?

Due: Talk Show Production Plan - Expanded Bonus marks for handing in your talk show production plan today (2%)

Lecture: It seems that the days of separation between Church (or Mosque, or Synagogue or Temple) and State are behind us. The increasing number of encounters with different faith-based communities requires journalists with an understanding that goes far beyond that “world religions” class in high school. How do you separate the facts from the many misunderstandings and get it right on a deadline? In recent years, Islam as a religion and
certain pockets on its extremist ends have challenged Western notions of tolerance, plurality and accommodation. Have journalists acted as responsible guides or fear mongers?

**Seminar: Readings:**

k51  http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2010/08/14/rex-murphy-
testing-americas-
tolerance/  http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2010/08/12/christ
opher-hitchens-the-appalling-campaign-against-the-ground-zero-
mosque/  Mamdani, Mahmood. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim – An African
Perspective" Mahmood Mamdani, Anthropology, Columbia University

Social Science Research Council. **Extra reading:**


**Week 8, Oct. 27: Race Due: News Feature**

Lecture: Topics to be discussed will include: racial profiling and stereotyping in society and in journalism. The social construction of race; how categories such as race, “visible minority,” “person of colour” differ and what this means for journalism and newsrooms. Sensitivity to racial factors in the coverage of crime and violence, national security and conflict.

**Seminar: Readings:**


http://www.thismagazine.ca/issues/2009/01/black_schools.php


**Week 9, Nov. 3: Methods of dealing - Use of comedy: Is Jon Stewart**
**a Journalist?** Due: **Talk Show - Extended Production Plan**


Watch and Listen: *Bill Moyers interviews Jon Stewart.* Video.

Kurtz, Howard  *"The Campaign of a Comedian."* Washington Post, October 23, 2004

---

**Week 10, Nov. 10: I Kissed A Girl** Due:

Lecture: Even in a country where same-sex marriage has been legal since 2005, there are only a handful of out journalists in Canada’s news media. The sometimes-private nature of sexual orientation means that coverage of issues relating to the gay, lesbian and trans-gendered communities require certain sensitivity in asking the questions and writing the stories. And when these stories are written, how do you ensure that the content doesn’t fall for the easy traps of stylishly dressed men and cat-loving lesbians with sensible shoes?  **Seminar:** Readings:


*Daly, Susan. "Boys," The Independent, November 22, 2008*


---

**Week 11, Nov. 17: How a 13 year old scooped a seasoned reporter**

Due: **Talk Show Presentations**

Lecture: The impact of Blogs, the Internet, YouTube, and other video/photo uploading, upcoming technology on the creation and dissemination of news. Will professional journalists become irrelevant as more and more bloggers and videographers take the news into their own hands? In this class we will examine the merits and shortfalls of citizen journalism. Is comment the same as reporting? And does opinion equal analysis? Is more journalism better for journalists?

**Seminar:** Talk Show Presentations (4 groups)

Readings:

* Blogger, Sans Pajamas, Rakes Muck and a Prize. The New York*


http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xikV0cFE3U

http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/sep/20/tavi-gevinson-new-york-fashion

Week 12, Nov. 24: The debates about digital media and Open Source
Lecture: Talk Show Presentations
Seminar: Talk Show Presentations (4 groups)

Week 13, Dec. 1: TBA. More details nearer the time.
Due: Final Test
Lecture: Seminar: Final Test
Readings: NO READINGS -

Assignments
Click here for Assignments

Format
All students meet on Wednesdays from 2 p.m. to 4 pm in KHE 221, for the lecture portion, which may include guest speakers and video presentations. After the lecture, separate seminar groups will meet for an hour, from 4 to 5 p.m., in rooms nearby to discuss the assigned reading and continue the discussion.
Readings

There’s no assigned textbook. All readings (journal articles as well as newspaper and magazine feature stories) will be posted on Blackboard on weekly basis in PDF or Word documents, or as web links. Please check the course’s Blackboard site regularly for updates. The readings will include academic and journalistic articles.

Communication

A wiki will be used for this course to relay all information in the class, except for grades, by the first week of classes. It will contain course outlines and most, if not all, of the readings. It will also serve as a notice board. However, urgent notifications may reach you via your Ryerson e-mail account, so make sure you monitor it daily. Please note that your tutorial leaders do not keep office hours. Any issues arising out of academic or personal circumstances must be addressed to me, either via email or during office hours.

Responsibilities

You are expected to show up on time for all classes. Do not schedule interviews or work for this course (or other courses) during the lecture and seminar times: Wednesday from 2-5 pm. You must have a Ryerson email account. I will not respond to any student emails from other accounts. The course, in part at least, deals with issues relating to democracy, gender, race, religion and sexuality in the news. I expect that all discussions are conducted in an atmosphere of respect to everyone in the room. There’s zero tolerance for any language deemed derogatory or offensive. I expect that any work you submit is entirely your own, and that you attribute all quotations and give sources for information. Penalties for fabrication, plagiarism or other forms of cheating will range from failing an assignment to failing the course and will include a disciplinary notice being placed on your academic record. As additional guidance, please note the
You are required to adhere to Ryerson University's Code of Academic Conduct, which covers plagiarism, and other transgressions. It is at: http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/pol60.pdf You are also required to adhere to the School of Journalism's Rules of Conduct, which contain greater detail about truth-telling issues specific to the practice of journalism. These are in the student handbook at: http://www.ryerson.ca/journalism/student_handbook/rules_of_the_game/index.html#Rules%20of%20Conduct... The student handbook also contains information on appeals and course management. The full university policies on these subjects, which set out in detail the responsibilities of academic units, instructors and students, can be found at: http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/policies/ (Policies 134 and 145).